

Freshford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 0300 1231231  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 03000 130570

Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr B Clark  
Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Liverpool City Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Dale Street  
Liverpool  
L2 2DH

Dear Mr Clark

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Liverpool City Council children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Liverpool City Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 October 2011. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to next year's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and senior practitioners undertaking referral and assessment duties; and other information provided by staff and managers. Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers and other practitioners.

The inspection identified areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Almost all areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 19 and 29 January 2010 have been addressed. However, while progress has been made, the reliability of the electronic social care record and ensuring the consistent recording of decisions taken by managers regarding children and young people's cases remain areas for development.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

**The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas**

- Thresholds for the involvement of children's services are clearly understood by partner agencies and as a result appropriate referrals are made to the service.
- Management oversight within Careline initial response service in respect of the large volume of contact and referrals is effective and decisions are clearly recorded. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Children at risk of significant harm are promptly identified. Child protection enquiries are carried out by qualified social workers and appropriate steps are taken to ensure that children and young people are safe.
- The quality of core assessments is satisfactory and partner agencies are appropriately consulted. Historical child protection concerns together with current risks and protective factors are clearly analysed. Where necessary, core assessments are effectively supplemented by a range of tailored risk assessments.
- Children's racial, cultural and religious identity is consistently recorded and appropriately considered during assessments. There is good access to and use of interpreters.
- Out-of-hours arrangements are well established and information is effectively transferred between daytime and out-of-hours services. The service completes initial assessments during evenings and weekends; this helps to ensure that needs are quickly assessed.
- Children and young people's views are suitably evidenced and appropriately incorporated into assessments. Children are seen alone where appropriate.
- Outcomes of assessments are generally shared with families. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Staff benefit from regular supervision and annual appraisal of their performance which provides clear management oversight of the progress of work.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board undertakes regular multi-agency auditing of the quality of referrals to children's social care and initial decision making. Senior managers receive reports arising from the regular and thorough case file audits undertaken by managers at all levels. These appropriately identify necessary corrective actions.
- Transfer arrangements between Careline initial response service and the safeguarding teams work effectively, ensuring that assessments start

promptly.

- Team managers receive a suitable range of management information to enable them to oversee performance. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

#### **Areas for development**

- Partner agencies making referrals to Careline are not consistently informed of the course of action to be followed.
- Within the city's safeguarding teams there are some delays in managers signing off assessments as completed.
- Practice in respect of the transfer of management decisions reached in supervision to electronic case records is too variable. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- The quality of initial assessments is inconsistent. Some assessments take good account of historical information and analyse risk well while others contain limited evidence that all potential risks to children and young people have been fully explored.
- Strategy discussions with the police are routinely held. However, other relevant agencies are less regularly involved and the recordings of these discussions do not routinely summarise the available information or outline the plan for the child protection enquiry.
- Considerable improvements have been made to the council's electronic social care record. However, it is acknowledged by the local authority that the system is not yet fully reliable and firm action is being taken to address this. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

Any areas for development identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

**Mary Varley**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Ged Fitzgerald, Chief Executive, Liverpool City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education