

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Councillor Chris Watt Lead Member Children's Service	
DATE of DECISION	On or after 1 st August 2010	E 2155
TITLE:	Response to the Ofsted unannounced inspection of the Council's contact referral and assessment arrangements in Children's social Care	
WARD:	ALL	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
1. Ofsted letter detailing inspection findings dated 17 th June 2010		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 To detail the outcome of the first unannounced inspection of the Council's contact, referral and assessment arrangements in Children's Social Care and advise how the Service will respond to the highlighted strengths, satisfactory practice and areas for development.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the report and the actions being taken by the Service
- 2.2 To note arrangements for future such unannounced inspections and announced inspections on safeguarding and looked after children arrangements

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

4 THE REPORT

4.1 Within the Government Response and Action Plan (May 2009) following the publication and recommendations of Lord Laming's report 'The Protection of Children in England – A Progress Report', provision was made for Ofsted to undertake annual unannounced inspections of Local Authority's contract, referral and assessment arrangements. Within this, the first inspection of Bath and North East Somerset Council's arrangements took place on 18th and 19th May, with inspections of the arrangements at the 'Riverside office (for North East Somerset) and at Lewis House (for Bath).

4.2 The unannounced inspections are not a full inspection of safeguarding. They are an inspection of front-line practice in relation to contact, referral and assessment processes for children in need and children who may be in need of protection and an assessment of how well practice helps to manage risk of harm to children and young people and minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect. The short inspections focus on the local authority as the lead agency for child protection. However, the contribution of partners to achieving good or better outcomes for children through effective multi-agency working is evaluated also as an integral part of the inspections.

4.3 The inspections are carried out under Section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. They contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of each local authority's children's services functions and are taken into account in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's statutory annual performance rating of the authority and in the wider Comprehensive Area Assessment. They do not preclude other inspections of safeguarding and services for looked after children arising out of joint inspectorate Comprehensive Area Assessments, as set out in the Comprehensive Area Assessments joint inspection framework.

4.4 Effective contact, referral and assessment arrangements are important in ensuring that the needs of children, young people and their parents and carers are accurately identified and that services are appropriately provided so that good or better safeguarding outcomes are achieved and sustained. Ofsted recognises that the quality of assessments, and the services that are commissioned as a result of good or better assessments, are key in helping to protect children. Inspectors use the scrutiny of case files with staff to assess the quality of assessment practice and the impact of multi-agency prevention and support for safeguarding those children and young people who are or may be in need.

4.5 Inspections include an evaluation of:

- the quality and timeliness of referrals and assessments, including:
 - the extent and quality of partner agency involvement
 - the involvement of children and their families
 - how this impacts on the services offered to children and their families
- the quality of management oversight and decision-making, including:
 - senior management audit of how well workers manage risk of harm through effective referral and assessment
 - case allocation and caseload management

- the quality of direct supervision and support
- the quality of case-file recording and arrangements for informing and involving senior managers in decision-making
- the application of thresholds, their clarity and consistency and how these impact on outcomes for children
- the impact of strategy discussions and enquiries in protecting children and young people
- the effectiveness of communication, liaison and joint working between agencies
- the effectiveness of out-of-hours provision, including accident and emergency health services, in managing risk of harm through effective information sharing, referral and assessment
- the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of children from particular groups
- how well services act on users' views
- the role and responsibilities of support staff, level of training and support received and how this impacts on the quality of service delivery
- the effectiveness of social workers and unqualified staff, including family support and social work assistants, in identifying, assessing and managing risk of harm for children and their families

4.6 Within the Government's Report and Action Plan provision was also made for announced inspectors of safeguarding and looked after children arrangements, taking place on a three year cycle. The findings of an unannounced inspection maybe used to determine the timing of the wider inspection of safeguarding and looked after children. If an unannounced inspection raises serious concerns, the lead inspector may recommend that a follow up inspection is carried out, including a full safeguarding inspection either undertaken separately or combined with an inspection of services for looked after children.

4.7 At the conclusion of the inspection visit, verbal feedback was provided by the lead inspector to the Director and Divisional Director of Children's Service including advice as to whether any priority actions were required (none were) and highlighting strengths, satisfactory practice, and areas for development. Following draft letters and factual accuracy checks, the final letter setting out the inspection findings was sent to the Director of Children's Service and copies to the Lead Member for Children's Service, the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Chief Executive of the Council. This letter was published on the Ofsted website on 17th June 2010 and is now a public document.

4.8 The Ofsted letter is attached as an appendix to this report.

4.9 The findings of the inspection have been shared with all Social Care and Children's Service Staff and with partner agencies (via briefings to the LSCB and the Children's Trust Board). Actions have been detailed and taken to address the areas for development, and is built upon the strengths and areas of satisfactory practice. Progress with these will be monitored by the Safeguarding, Social Care and Family Services Management Group and reported to the Director of Children's Service and the Lead Member. Progress will also be discussed with

the Children's Service Adviser at the Government Office South West (GOSW) and no doubt evaluated at the next unannounced inspection.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance. This was detailed, together with mitigating actions, in the Service Risk Register.

6 EQUALITIES

6.1 Promoting diversity and supporting individual identity and recognising and valuing the racial and cultural diversity of Bath and North East Somerset's communities and a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice are values under mining the work of Children's Social Care Service.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Staff from the two locality duty teams subject to the inspection and staff across Children's Social Care Service were consulted about the actions to respond to the areas for developed highlighted in the inspection.

7.2 The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report at its meeting on 12th July 2010.

7.3 A copy of this report was sent to the Trades Unions on 21st July for information.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 None. The Lead Member should be provided with a report about this unannounced inspection to inform the review of overall safeguarding arrangements

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Council Solicitor) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	