

17 June 2010

Mr Ashley Ayre
Strategic Director: Children's Services
Bath and North East Somerset Council
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Dear Mr Ayre

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bath and North East Somerset 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 Bath and North East Somerset Council which was conducted on 18 and 19 May 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year. 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, other practitioners and administrative staff.

The inspection identified areas of strength and satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is a strong commitment to prevention and early intervention. The common assessment framework is well embedded and good quality assessment practice ensures that children and young people are appropriately supported in their communities.



- The council has been effective in retaining staff. Staff benefit from good levels of professional support, regular supervision and high quality appropriate training. Staff interviewed during the inspection were very positive about the support they receive from managers.
- Investment in increased social work capacity and a quality assurance management post have been put in place to improve the quality of service delivery. Further capacity has been created through the integrated solutions project, which is enabling more effective early interventions for some children and their families.
- There are good family support services offering timely and effective support to children and their families. This includes families and children experiencing domestic violence who receive high quality intervention and support.

Satisfactory practice

- Decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Child protection enquiries are timely and are carried out thoroughly by suitably qualified and experienced social workers. Strategy meetings consistently involve relevant partner agencies which results in a co-ordinated and appropriate response.
- There is good partnership working with the police child abuse investigation team which leads to timely and appropriate action to protect children and young people.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) quality assures child protection work, provides feedback to staff and identifies issues for the development of practice. The LSCB regularly monitors performance indicators relevant to front line practice.
- Assessments undertaken by the children with disability team are of good quality but they are not consistently completed in accordance with statutory timescales. The social work service provided by the team is well received by parents.

Areas for development

- Management oversight and recording of decisions on some cases are not systematic and consistent and case file auditing processes are insufficiently developed.
- The council is unable to ensure that all information relevant to the family is taken into account in assessment and decision making. This is due to a combination of not having a single record for a child, not all files having

chronologies and closure summaries, and other information not being recorded or entered onto the system in a timely manner.

- Children are seen by social workers during assessments and enquiries but their wishes and feelings are not always clearly identified in documentation.
- There is inconsistent recording and consideration of the identity, ethnicity, religion and cultural needs of children and their families in assessment and planning.
- Initial and core assessments are of variable quality. Some are good. However others lack sufficient analysis and are not consistently explicit in highlighting risk and protective factors. There are significant delays in recording of some assessments, although children are seen and action is taken promptly in most cases.
- Children in need plans are not always in place and child protection plans do not consistently include contingency plans. Plans are not sufficiently specific with measurable outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul d'Inverno
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Everitt, Chief Executive, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Chris Watt, Lead Member for Children's Services, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education