

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



9 June 2011

Ms Joyce Thacker
Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
1st Floor
Norfolk House
Walker Place
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S65 1AS

Dear Ms Thacker

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough 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 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 10 and 11 May 2011. 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 one area of strength and a number of areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2009 and further considered by the Safeguarding and Looked After children Inspection in August 2010 have been substantially addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council is strongly committed to promote the professional development of the social care workforce. A 'PQ guarantee' enables all social workers to undertake post qualifying learning and development, delivered and accredited by the University of Sheffield to at least post graduate certificate level. Managers are supported to achieve an MA in Social Work Leadership and Management.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thresholds for access to children's services are applied consistently and are agreed and well understood by partner agencies. ▪ The overall quality of assessments is adequate in identifying risk and protective factors and in some cases such assessments are of high quality and informed by relevant research. The contribution from multi-agency partners co-located with social workers is effective in ensuring that assessment of need and risk are suitably comprehensive. ▪ The wishes and feelings of children and young people are fully considered within assessments and are appropriately taken into account in the formulation of plans. ▪ The council and its partners have implemented a wide range of integrated preventative services, supported by the use of the common assessment framework. This is offering appropriate assistance and support to children in need. ▪ Child protection enquiries are prioritised and undertaken by staff who are suitably qualified and experienced. ▪ Effective arrangements such as good access to interpreters are in place to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with respect to race, culture and religion. Issues of equality and diversity are suitably considered and addressed within assessments and care planning. ▪ The electronic information and communication systems in use within children's social care services efficiently support front line workers to meet the needs of children and young people. ▪ Children and young people with a disability receive an effective service from the specialist disabled children team who undertake contact, referral and assessment responsibilities. ▪ Out of hours duty arrangements are effective and appropriately linked to daytime contact, referral and assessment processes. In addition to responding to crisis referrals team members undertake some welfare and monitoring visits.

- Senior managers have established a range of quality audit, case monitoring and performance assessment tools to identify and report on service effectiveness and workforce capacity. These developments are improving aspects of practice and performance including the timeliness of assessments.
- The recent and comprehensive restructuring of the Central Area Locality Service is showing impact in addressing previous service challenges arising from high volumes of work and levels of need within diverse communities. This approach is strongly supported by all staff and managers.
- The views and wishes of children are sought to inform planning and service provision. This was recently effective in influencing the council to agree they act as guarantor for young people seeking local authority accommodation.

Areas for development

- The high volume of domestic violence notifications from the police is placing considerable pressure on the access team leading to some delays in screening. Although the majority of notifications relate to lower level concerns and do not indicate risk of immediate harm the timeliness of some initial assessments is being adversely affected by the absence of an effective screening system.
- The regularity and quality of formal supervision is variable and at times poor. This was a previous area for development during the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection of 2010 and the unannounced inspection of 2009.
- Although there have been recent developments to improve the level of support for newly qualified social workers, including the creation of four Practice Consultant posts, some report they do not have access to a relevant professional development programme including induction, reduced caseloads and enhanced levels of supervision.
- Workloads within some teams and for newly qualified social workers remain high. This is reducing opportunities for social workers to undertake direct work with children and young people.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Tarpey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Martin Kimber, Chief Executive, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education