

AGENDA ITEM 33

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 Terry Parkin
Strategic Director of People Services
Brighton and Hove City Council
King's House
Grand Avenue
Hove
BN3 2LS

Dear Mr Parkin

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Brighton and Hove 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 Brighton and Hove City Council which by agreement with you was conducted as part of the pilot ILACS inspection on 22 and 23 November 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, other practitioners and administrative staff.

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

The collective findings of the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010 gave great impetus to the decision to re-organise the duty teams to create a single Advice, Contact and Assessment Service (ACAS) for the city to replace the three area based teams. The nine areas of development that were identified have been built into a comprehensive action plan and in all but two areas demonstrable improvements have been made and the minimum requirements of statutory guidance have been at least met. The two remaining areas, relating to the lack of consistent focus upon, firstly, children's needs in assessment and, secondly, upon outcomes in children's plans have been brought forward into this letter.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since the current senior leadership team came into post, incisive and effective action has been taken to secure political support and create a single point of access to safeguarding and child protection services which since implementation in September 2011 has demonstrated significant impact upon the quality of initial responses to referrals. ▪ Despite continuing high demand, good management oversight has ensured that caseloads of social workers in the assessment teams are manageable and allow vulnerable children and young people to receive prompt and effective safeguarding services.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial and core assessments are always undertaken by qualified social work staff. Completed assessments are appropriately signed off by line managers. ▪ All children benefit from a single and accessible case record that enables all relevant information to be taken into account in assessment and decision making. ▪ Children who are suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm receive a prompt and appropriate service from suitably qualified and experienced social workers. ▪ Out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear and are appropriately linked to the daytime referral processes. This ensures that children and young people's needs are promptly assessed. ▪ Clear procedures and policies are in place to inform practice and ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard and protect children and young people are met. ▪ There is a consistent application of thresholds for accessing the local authority's social care service. ▪ Staff who work in ACAS are suitably qualified and experienced. They are able to demonstrate that they attend relevant training including lessons from serious case reviews. They also receive good support from their line managers.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The application of thresholds during section 47 enquiries and at case conferences is inconsistent and leads to some children and young people being

unnecessarily subject to child protection processes.

- Some assessments, including common assessment framework (CAF), have insufficient focus on the individual needs of each child or young person. Assessment quality, including CAF, was central to two areas for development at the last inspection.
- Some case plans remain insufficiently outcome focused which causes delay in securing positive change. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- First line managers, team managers and independent reviewing officers do not consistently identify ineffective social work practice, particularly in complex cases where progress is slow.
- Supervision is inconsistently reflective and analytical and does not have sufficient impact upon improving casework and securing improved outcomes for all children and young people.
- The individual needs of children and their families as defined by their race, culture, language and religion are not identified and considered in casework practice or case planning in all cases.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Hart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Barradell, Chief Executive, Brighton and Hove City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education

