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Mr Stuart Gallimore
Executive Director of Children's Services
West Sussex County Council
County Hall
West Street
Chichester
PO19 1QT

Dear Mr Gallimore

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within West Sussex County 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 West Sussex County Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 August 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 areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in October 2009 have been addressed. The two areas for priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in October 2009 have also been addressed. However, one aspect of staff supervision relating to the consistent recording of staff personal development plans remains an area for development.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

| Strengths |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Robust performance management and quality assurance systems are in place providing accurate and real-time information to managers on all aspects of contact, referral and assessment services including work flow. The systems are underpinned by systematic and effective case auditing arrangements. These arrangements are enabling managers to respond quickly to changes in performance and to plan ahead in respect of work pressures. ▪ The establishment of the Children's Access Point (CAP) is improving the consistency of contacts and referrals to children's social care and the responsiveness of services to vulnerable children and young people. The additional resources provided to develop CAP and to increase staffing capacity illustrates the commitment of elected members to ensuring safeguarding continues to have high priority within the council and wider partnership. |
| The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child protection policies and procedures are up to date and used appropriately to provide clarity in safeguarding work. These are supported by written management instructions which set standards and practice expectations. ▪ Thresholds for contacts and referrals are clearly defined and understood and being consistently applied across the partnership. Suitable escalation processes are in place. ▪ In the majority of cases seen by inspectors effective communication and collaboration between CAP, referral and assessment services and partner agencies is ensuring timely and appropriate action to safeguard vulnerable children and young people. ▪ There have been significant improvements in the quality and timeliness of initial and core assessments and arrangements to investigate child protection concerns since the last unannounced inspection. The quality of need and risk analysis, case recording and management oversight has also improved. Case chronologies and histories are consistently being recorded and updated. The views of children and young people are being captured well within case recording. ▪ Child protection investigations are conducted by suitably qualified and experienced social workers with examples of effective joint working with the police. Management support and direction on investigations is also clear. Children and young people are routinely seen alone during investigations and social worker visits. Caseloads are appropriately weighted in respect of complexity and staff skill and experience. ▪ Out of hours arrangements ensure duty staff have appropriate access to |

electronic case records in order to respond to contacts and referrals.

- Staff supervision arrangements offer consistent and regular management direction on cases and support to staff. Additional measures are in place for newly qualified workers.

Areas for development

- Although most aspects of staff supervision identified at the previous inspection have been fully addressed, staff personal development and training needs are not consistently evident in supervision records.
- Equality and diversity issues are identified in basic case information but any specific actions arising from individual circumstances are not routinely recorded.
- Inspectors identified that health visitors do not always ask to see children when making home visits. As staff in partner agencies have an equal duty to see children and young people when visiting families at home the Local Safeguarding Children Board should remind representatives of this responsibility.
- The use of the common assessment framework is well embedded but further attention is required to ensure its use is more closely monitored in terms of impact and outcomes and that business processes are streamlined to meet this requirement.
- User views, derived from individual case records, are not being fully collated to help inform quality assurance processes or to contribute to the continued development of service.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Ayres
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Kieran Stigant, Chief Executive, West Sussex County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education