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Mrs Sue Imbriano  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1YU

Dear Ms Imbriano

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Buckinghamshire County Council children's services**

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Buckinghamshire County Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 June 2009. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: 47 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for the support provided and for the time given by you and your colleagues during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the Referral, Assessment and Contact services were satisfactorily carrying out their responsibilities in accordance with national guidance, in particular:



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales. All contacts are seen by a manager within 24 hours and appropriate decisions about all incoming work are being made.
- Agreed interagency thresholds for social care services are applied consistently and reviewed regularly.
- Record keeping is up to date and demonstrates effective management of risk of harm, decision-making and effective planning.
- Senior managers regularly carry out audits of files and services and use these audits to improve practice. There is an effective audit plan for safeguarding across the authority, which is signed off by the cabinet members for children.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children and family members are actively involved in assessment or planning to meet the child's needs. The impact of this is that there are high quality assessments leading to realistic plans agreed by family members and partners. These impact positively on the safeguarding and protection of children. Plans are implemented in a timely way and reviewed regularly.</li> <li>▪ Section 47 enquiries are thorough, timely and always carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker.</li> <li>▪ All staff in the referral and assessment teams receive high quality supervision on a regular basis and staff, including agency staff, are able to access appropriate training. This ensures staff are competent and able to offer a good and consistent service to vulnerable children.</li> <li>▪ Effective and well established communication channels between agencies are beneficial to the safeguarding of children. Partnership working is successful and ensures children receive a well integrated service.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Service priorities and performance management arrangements are not consistently implemented.</li> <li>▪ The completion of initial and core assessments frequently takes longer than the recommended period. Whilst the quality of assessments is generally very good, there is a risk that the time taken could leave some children without the service they require.</li> </ul>

- The arrangements for transfer of cases between social work teams are not clear. The flow of work within the service is therefore disrupted and it is not possible to give certainty to children and parents about who will be responsible for the service provided.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a horizontal line underneath.

Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Chris Williams, Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire County Council  
Donald McPhail, Chair of Buckinghamshire Local Safeguarding Children Board  
Lin Hazell, Lead Member for Children's Services, Buckinghamshire County Council  
John Browning, Department for Children, Schools and Families