Vulnerable children ‘still at risk of harm’

28 March 2024



Ofsted has been running monitoring visits to check on children’s services at BCP Council, after finding it inadequate in December 2021

Vulnerable children in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are still being put at risk of harm by failing social services, according to a watchdog.

Ofsted has been running monitoring visits to check on children’s services at BCP Council, after finding it inadequate in December 2021.

The inspectorate said the authority had made “considerable progress” but there were still areas for improvement.

Director of children’s services Cathi Hadley said there was “more work to do”.

An Ofsted report released in 2022 previously said “serious and widespread weaknesses” were leaving children unprotected.

In the past two years, inspectors have visited BCP services to monitor progress six times, with the most recent taking place on 21 and 22 February.

This visit focused on the authority’s “front door” – a phrase used to describe the moment children’s services first have contact with a child and family, Ofsted said.

Improvements to SEND services ‘too slow’

Council proposes children's and youth centre cuts

Council's children's services improving – watchdog

Its report said: "Although there are areas for further improvement in ensuring all children get the right help at the right time, senior leaders understand what these areas are and have a credible plan to implement further changes that are needed."

However, inspectors found the quality of referrals between children's services, police, health, education and mental health services were "predominantly poor".

The report highlighted "oversights" by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, known as Mash, which it stated were due to "a lack of professional curiosity".

Ms Hadley, who took on the role as director of children's services in 2021, explained: "Some files I would look at in 2021, there is a very great lack of professional curiosity

"Let's say a mum's relationships are always with partners who may be perpetrators of domestic abuse. In the past, we've probably seen mum as the safety for the children, without really considering her needs as somebody who has chosen partners are violent.

"I think in 2021 we were seeing the domestic abuse as a partnership issue, whereas now I look at files and talk to social workers and professionals who actually do identify the challenges for children and young people living in that environment."

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council is expecting its next Ofsted inspection in the winter

Ms Hadley said the authority now had a domestic abuse specialist and added it was organising workshops with partner services to improve this.

She said one child at risk was "too many" and added the council was now "working across the system" to ensure people had the necessary skills for front door services.

Ms Hadley added: “There is more to do, but we are making improvements and we’re seeing how we can work across the system to make sure children aren’t aren’t vulnerable and aren’t left in situations they shouldn’t be.”

Ofsted has now finished its monitoring visits and a BCP Council spokesperson said the authority was expecting an updated inspection in the winter.

[Source: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-68672622]