

27 July 2011

Ms Carolyn Godfrey
Director of the Department for Children and Education
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JQ

Dear Ms Godfrey

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wiltshire 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 Wiltshire Council which was conducted on 28 and 29 June 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 majority of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010 have been addressed.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Crisis Intervention Service provides highly effective and responsive provision to children and young people who need support in the evenings and



weekends to allow them to stay with their families and or in their placement. The service is recognised by social workers and children and families as a valuable resource.

- In partnership with the Housing Options Service, a Host Family Scheme has been developed to offer emergency short term placements of up to three weeks for young people who have become homeless. It provides the opportunity to make a full assessment of their needs and ensures long term plans are in place for their future. As a result, a high proportion of young people, who are referred to the scheme, have their long term accommodation requirements successfully met.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Contacts and referrals are undertaken in a consistent and timely manner.
- The timeliness of initial and core assessments has improved over the past year. In cases seen by inspectors, the quality of these assessments was at least adequate, with good use of historical information and risk and protective factors clearly outlined in most cases.
- Initial child protection conferences are held promptly and there is good multi-agency involvement.
- The emergency duty service provides a comprehensive response to out of hours referrals. Welfare visits to families and child protection investigations are undertaken where necessary. Robust communication systems are in place to ensure that work is effectively transferred to the daytime services.
- Supervision has become increasingly timely and quality of recording is improving. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Case recording is largely up to date. Management oversight and decision making was evident on the majority of case files seen during the inspection.
- An increase in administrative capacity and effective deployment of support staff ensures that the clerical functions of the service are undertaken in a timely manner. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- An effective system of structured case file audits has been introduced to improve the quality of assessments and case recording. A designated team of experienced staff work alongside social workers and managers to review cases and highlight areas for improvement. The results of these audits are monitored by senior managers. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- The performance of the referral and assessment service is robustly managed by senior managers and elected members, through a social care improvement board. Rapid and effective action has been taken to address shortfalls. For

example, as a response to identified inconsistencies in practice between individual teams, a single county-wide referral and assessment service with an enhanced management team has been created.

- Research and good practice from other areas is used well to improve the quality of services.
- Managers and social workers have good access to external and internal training and development. As a result, an effective learning culture is being developed within the team.
- Satisfactory progress has been made to develop the use of the common assessment framework (CAF) for children who do not meet the threshold for statutory services. Over the past two years, there has been a significant increase in the range of agencies completing CAFs and in the numbers of children who have received interventions as a result. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

Areas for development

- Although strategy discussions between children's social care and the police regarding child protection enquiries are timely, they do not routinely include all relevant agencies. In some cases, the lack of social work capacity results in an inability to carry out joint investigations.
- The service has a strong working relationship with the police child abuse and investigation team (CAIT). However CAIT do not provide an out of hours service. As a result, some decisions about the progress of child protection investigations are made by police officers who are not always suitably trained or experienced in child protection.
- Thresholds for provision of services by children's social care are not clearly understood by all partners. The authority is aware of this deficit and new criteria have recently been agreed with partner agencies.
- The quality of information in the referrals received by the service is variable. Some require significant follow-up by social workers to clarify the concerns about the child or young person and actions expected by the referrer.
- Despite increased timeliness of assessments, some initial assessments are approved by managers without the child being seen. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Support to newly qualified social workers is variable. Some newly qualified staff are allocated child protection work prior to receiving the appropriate training.
- Assessments do not consistently address the ethnicity and diversity issues of children, young people and their families. This was an area for development at

the last inspection.

- In some cases, the voice of the child and their family is not explicitly recognised in assessments. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Andrew Kerr, Chief Executive, Wiltshire Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education