

26 August 2010

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 July 2010. 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

Strengths

- In June 2010 following extensive analysis the council took effective action by restructuring its children's services. This includes the establishment of two new countywide initial referral and assessment teams which are beginning to enable the council to deliver more timely and consistent services.
- The children with disabilities service provides timely, needs-led assessments



with excellent multi-agency input and active participation by the families with whom it works.

Satisfactory practice

- The referral and assessment service is sufficiently resourced to meet incoming demand and social work caseloads are manageable.
- The inspection did not identify any cases of children or young people at risk of harm not being appropriately safeguarded.
- Safeguarding procedures comply with statutory requirements. Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales and children's need for assessment are effectively prioritised at an early stage.
- Child protection enquiries are appropriately prioritised and always carried out by a qualified social worker. All child protection or child in need cases are allocated to suitably experienced and qualified social workers.
- Case transfer protocols have been revised as part of the recent restructuring clearly specifying the arrangements between the referral and assessment teams and other teams. These ensure the capacity of the duty teams to respond appropriately to incoming work is not compromised.
- Robust systems and communication arrangements are in place to enable the seamless transfer of information between duty teams and the emergency duty service.
- Partnership working between statutory agencies on allocated cases contributes effectively to the safeguarding of children and young people.
- Social workers are well supported by their managers and are positive about training opportunities available to them.

Areas for development

- Although the use of the common assessment framework has significantly increased since the Joint Area Review in 2008, further progress has yet to be made before it fully supports wider inter-agency working and commonly agreed thresholds.
- Management oversight is insufficiently robust in ensuring all contacts are systematically and consistently recorded.
- The quality of core and initial assessments is inconsistent. While some are good, others lack sufficient analysis and do not have clear service recommendations or specific and measurable action plans. Similarly risk and protective factors that impact on a child or young person's welfare are not consistently recorded in a timely manner.
- Some initial assessments are signed off without the child being seen or when incomplete. This is not in line with statutory guidance.
- Some child in need cases do not have a completed core assessment to

determine need and an insufficient number of core assessments are undertaken.

- Weaknesses in the recording and completion of some child in need plans make it difficult to identify what action has been taken or what decisions have been made. These include incomplete individual plans, poor recording of risk and protective factors, a lack of contingency planning and evidence of how casework decisions are reached.
- Children are routinely seen during assessments but their views are not always recorded and it is unclear how their views are taken into account in plans for their future.
- While the ethnicity of children, young people and families is mostly recorded and interpreters are used as required, assessments do not consistently reflect consideration of cultural, ethnic, or religious needs.
- Administrative processes within the referral and assessment team are well structured and support work within the service. However there is insufficient capacity to meet demand resulting, for example, in delayed case closures or letters not being sent out in a timely manner.
- Performance management and monitoring systems, including systematic auditing of case files, are not consistently applied to effectively support the work of the duty teams.
- Although formal staff supervision is in place, the council's targets relating to the frequency of supervision are not always met and the rigour of challenge to practice is not sufficiently well evidenced through recording in either personal staff files or in case directions.
- There is insufficient level 3 child protection training available to social workers to meet demand. Not all social workers within the children with disability teams have been able to access the training, which presents a potential risk to the 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

Lynne Staines
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Andrew Kerr, Chief Executive, Wiltshire Council
Pam Robinson, Chair of Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board
Lionel Grundy, Lead Member for Children's Services, Wiltshire Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education