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22 July 2009

Mr Roy Lockwood
Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services
Wolverhampton City Council
Civic Centre
St. Peter's Square
Wolverhampton
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Dear Mr Lockwood

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wolverhampton City 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 Wolverhampton City 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: electronic case records and paper files; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers 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 help and 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:

- All social work posts were filled and there was low staff turnover.



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- There is effective management of work. Cases are allocated promptly and none are unallocated.
- Managers provide regular supervision and staff report good management support and training opportunities.
- The views of children and parents are sought and are taken into account when assessing their needs and planning how those needs are met.
- The cultural and religious needs of children and families from minority ethnic backgrounds are given proper consideration.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action taken to respond to child protection referrals and concerns is timely and appropriate, ensuring that children most at risk were helped to be safe. ▪ The initial assessments seen during the course of the inspection were generally of a good quality and responsive to individual needs. ▪ The quality of initial case conference reports was good, with appropriate identification and analysis of risk. ▪ Where the need for additional support to a family was identified, timely action was taken to provide appropriate services and cases were transferred promptly to locality teams. ▪ Quality assurance was very good. Managers across the Children and Young People's Service were involved in systematic case file monitoring, the outcomes of which were reported to senior managers on a quarterly basis. Regular workshops for practitioners support their continuing development.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A large number of paper files was left unsecured out-of-office hours, risking breaches of service user confidentiality. A solution to this has been identified but not fully implemented. ▪ Initial assessments are not always completed in a timely way. ▪ Assessments generally identify needs but the practice of not undertaking core assessments as part of section 47 enquiries, including those going to initial child protection case conferences, is not compliant with <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i>. ▪ User views are not systematically sought in order to inform service development.

- Some partner agencies, in particular criminal justice agencies, have an insufficient understanding of when to make referrals to children's services, resulting in many inappropriate referrals. Work has started to address this.

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: Richard Carr, Chief Executive, Wolverhampton City Council
Roy Lockwood, Chair of Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board
Christine Mills, Lead Member for Children's Services, Wolverhampton City Council
John Browning, Department for Children, Schools and Families

