

Freshford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 9456333  
Direct F 0117 9456554  
Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



5 February 2010

Mr Nick Hudson  
Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
Progress House  
Westwood Park Drive  
Wigan  
WN3 4HH

Dear Mr Hudson

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wigan Metropolitan Borough 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 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 January 2010. 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.

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; 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 your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Effective action is taken to ensure that children at risk of immediate harm are safeguarded.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- The contact, referral and assessment service has recently been restructured following recommendations arising from a review of safeguarding practice, and as a result all initial assessments are now conducted by qualified social workers.
- Thresholds for children in need and child protection work are clear and widely understood across agencies leading to appropriate referrals being made.
- Record keeping is up to date and managerial decisions are clearly recorded.
- Regular casework audits of the contact, referral and assessment service are in place.
- Work undertaken within the contact, referral and assessment service ensures that children are routinely interviewed and is child centred.
- Senior managers are readily available to provide advice and guidance to support social workers in making appropriate decisions, particularly in relation to complex cases.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Wigan Safeguarding Children Board is effectively responding to a comprehensive audit of safeguarding completed following the Laming review. A regularly updated action plan incorporates actions from serious case reviews and other practice audits, and is driving forward improvements in safeguarding practice and procedures.</li> <li>▪ The training programme is targeted effectively at improving areas of weak performance. Staff and managers report that training is of a high quality and readily accessible.</li> <li>▪ Staff morale is good. Supervision is regular, of good quality and complies with the council's supervision policy.</li> <li>▪ The quality of work undertaken by the Children with Complex Needs team is good.</li> <li>▪ Good communication and liaison with partner agencies have led to a comprehensive review of the responsiveness of the council to domestic abuse referrals.</li> </ul>

### Areas for development

- Management decision making regarding contacts is not always timely, causing delayed responses to some referrals. However, no children were identified as being at immediate risk.
- There has been a decline over the past six months in the proportion of initial assessments of children in need being completed within timescale and this is now below the national average.
- Initial child protection conferences are not consistently held within timescale. The council is aware of this problem and is taking steps to secure improvements.
- Information regarding the ethnicity of families is not being routinely gathered at the point of initial contact.
- Initial and core assessments are of variable quality and management oversight of the quality and timeliness of assessments is not consistently rigorous. In some cases analysis is of a low standard with insufficient use of historical information or recognition of parental strengths. In some instances parental explanations about issues of concern are not robustly challenged.
- While procedures for the transfer of cases between the contact, duty and assessment teams and long term teams have improved, case transfer meetings do not consistently challenge the appropriateness or the urgency of transfer decisions.

Yours sincerely

**David Asher**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Joyce Redfearn, Chief Executive, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
Sue Woolmore, Chair of Wigan Safeguarding Children Board  
Sue Loudon, Lead Member for Children's Services, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families