

28 July 2010

Ms Elaine McHale
Corporate Director of Children's Services
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
County Hall
Wood Street
Wakefield
WF1 2HQ

Dear Ms McHale

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within City of Wakefield Metropolitan District 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 City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council which was conducted on 29 and 30 June 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 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Local authority senior managers are aware of the strengths and areas for development in the social work teams that deal with contacts, referrals and assessments. Clear plans are in place to tackle the recent performance issues in these teams, and some improvements are already evident.



- The Social Care Direct team is an innovative service which responds to all requests for a social work assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This ensures a consistent and coordinated response to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families across Wakefield.

Satisfactory practice

- Child protection concerns are responded to promptly.
- In all assessments children are seen and interviewed in a timely and appropriate manner. Clear and prompt feedback is given to referrers.
- All of the children and families teams who carry out assessments are staffed by suitably qualified and experienced workers.
- Although there have been recent capacity issues within the Social Care Direct and other social work teams, committed and enthusiastic staff report good morale, manageable caseloads and regular formal supervision and support. Managers are also readily available for consultation on a daily basis.
- There is a good training programme which meets the individual needs of social workers and includes access to external and specialist support.
- A well established mentor scheme is in place and newly qualified workers are effectively supported.
- The Wakefield and District Safeguarding Children Board and the local authority legal department run briefing sessions for social workers on the learning from serious case reviews. The staff report that these are good and assist them in their day-to-day work.
- Senior managers regularly audit case files and scrutinise decision making on individual cases.

Areas for development

- There have been a number of recent staffing issues in children's services. Agency and temporary staff have now been recruited and the council has identified the need for additional staffing. However, at the time of the inspection, there were significant delays in the completion of assessments and unallocated cases in all of the social work teams. Unallocated cases are managed on a duty basis, and senior managers are aware of and monitor each individual case. From the cases examined no children were seen to be at risk but they are experiencing delays in having their needs met.
- Several hundred contacts are received by children's social care on a monthly basis from the police. The local authority and the police are working together to ensure better presentation of this information and the prioritisation of these referrals.
- A number of examples were seen of the police carrying out initial criminal enquiries and interviews with children in child protection investigations before holding strategy discussions with Wakefield Children's Services. The local

authority is working with the police to address this issue.

- The common assessment framework process is yet to be fully embedded. Referrals from other agencies are not always clear about the reason for contacting children's social care resulting in significant amount of time being spent by social workers discussing with referrers other ways of supporting children and their families.
- The quality of assessments is inconsistent. Some are thorough and detailed while others lack information on the family, risk analysis and consideration of whether issues of disability or ethnicity were relevant in the assessments. There is little recorded evidence of the management challenge of the findings of the assessments.
- The quality of the contact forms completed in the Social Care Direct team varies. In many instances these forms are completed following significant social worker involvement including liaison with other agencies and families over a number of days. In a number of instances the amount of work undertaken meets the definition of an initial assessment in government guidance, however, it is not recorded as such and is an under-recording of the children's services performance in this area.
- The local authority electronic recording system requires lengthy input from workers and managers. Due to the volume of recording social workers spend too long completing forms and documents which involve significant duplication and are not helpful in assisting them in carrying out their work. Extensive work has been undertaken by the local authority and a planned further upgrade to the information technology (IT) system is due to be implemented in January 2011.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Penswick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Ms Joanne Roney, Chief Executive, City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Edwina Harrison, Chair of Wakefield and District Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Pat Garbutt, Portfolio Holder Children and Young People, City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education