

25 November 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 summarises 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 27 and 28 October 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 areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The majority of areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in February 2010 have been addressed. However further work is on-going to improve the quality of analysis in core assessments and this remains an area for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Good partnership working between police, health and social care has significantly reduced the number of inappropriate domestic abuse referrals to



children's social care. This partnership strategy, endorsed by Wigan Safeguarding Children Board has resulted in more timely and effective safeguarding of children living in families with domestic abuse.

- The common assessment framework (CAF) is firmly established across the partnership with clearly agreed thresholds and good arrangements for co-ordination, monitoring and audit. This ensures that families receive good quality support from a range of agencies and has led to a significant reduction in the number of referrals to children's services for family support and more effective targeting of social care resources.

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

- Practice and procedures enable the management of risk and ensure good outcomes for children and young people. An experienced manager ensures effective prioritisation and timely decision making. Children suffering or at risk of harm are identified quickly and receive appropriate responses.
- Policies and procedures are readily accessible to staff and are known and used effectively.
- Strategy meetings are used effectively, include relevant agencies and are clearly recorded with appropriate action plans. Section 47 enquiries are thorough and timely and always carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker.
- The council ensures that the majority of initial assessments are now completed within timescales.
- Initial assessments are clear, analytical and identify risk and protective factors. Conclusions and judgements about standards of care enable effective plans to be put in place.
- Children and family members are routinely involved in their initial assessments and Section 47 enquiries, and their views and feelings are taken into account.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear, robust and linked well to the day referral service.
- Critically reflective supervision is provided for all staff and suitable training is available, including lessons from serious case reviews. This is contributing to improving practice.
- Staff in the referral and assessment team are suitably qualified and experienced and are supported by experienced managers.
- Staff morale is good. Staff feel well supported by senior managers who are visible and accessible to them on a formal and informal basis for advice and guidance.
- The council have taken appropriate action to address most of the findings from

the last unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements. Senior managers have developed a range of quality assurance and monitoring activities which have led to improvements in practice and to the identification of further training and development work.

Areas for development

- The quality of core assessments remains variable. In some of these assessments the quality of analysis is poor and there is limited recording of children's views. This was identified as an area for development at the last inspection. This is recognised by senior managers and plans are in place to rectify this issue including the commissioning of relevant training.
- The impact of culture, religion, linguistic needs and disability is not sufficiently explored in initial and core assessments or given proper consideration in individual plans.
- The Integrated Children's System (ICS) is very cumbersome requiring staff to operate two systems. This is time consuming and takes time away from work with families. The performance data produced by ICS does not accurately capture actual performance on the completion of assessments by social work teams.
- Not all staff have an up-to-date appraisal to identify and meet development and learning needs and address issues identified by performance management activity.
- Staff workloads are variable, and in some cases are too high. For example some experienced staff in the duty team are carrying very high case loads. Although this is not affecting the timely completion of work it does limit the opportunity for reflective practice and the entering of written assessments onto ICS.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Humphreys
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 Education