

6 May 2011

Mr Victor Brownlees
Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Telford and Wrekin Council
Civic Offices
Coach Central
Telford
TF3 4HD

Dear Mr Brownlees

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Telford and Wrekin 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 Telford and Wrekin Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 March 2011. 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 two areas of strength and areas of practice that met statutory requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in May 2010 were considered as part of the inspection. Progress was found in all areas except one which remains as an area for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The authority operates an innovative and effective multi-agency approach to protecting children at risk of sexual exploitation which is recognised nationally



as a practice leader in this area.

- The authority has invested in business support officer posts who provide extensive, individualised support for social workers. The level and quality of this support enables workers to efficiently manage their casework and spend more time with children and families. The introduction of this support has had a very positive impact on social worker morale.

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

- Child protection enquiries are thorough, timely and always carried out by a qualified and suitably experienced social worker. Risk is clearly identified and where necessary prompt action is taken to ensure children's safety. There is consistent management oversight and direction of this work.
- Arrangements for the screening of contacts and referrals have been strengthened. All staff involved in initial screening are suitably qualified for their role and their work receives regular management oversight and direction leading to appropriate, timely and consistent decision making. This was an area for development from the last unannounced inspection.
- Thresholds for children's social care are well understood and operate effectively across partner agencies.
- Use of the common assessment framework and a Team around the Child approach is well established and there is a good range of family support services. This means many children and young people are appropriately supported without the need for specialist social care services.
- Partnership arrangements for working with children at risk of significant harm are strong with agencies in most cases contributing well to assessment and care planning for these children.
- The needs of disabled children are responded to in a sensitive manner which addresses individual needs including the need for child protection when necessary.
- Children and young people are routinely seen and spoken to as part of the assessment process and most assessments seen by inspectors demonstrated an understanding of the child's perspective. This was an area for development from the last unannounced inspection.
- At the time of the inspection all cases were appropriately allocated. This was an area for development from the last unannounced inspection.
- Out-of-hours arrangements are well established and responsive with effective communication between daytime and out-of-hours services. Standards for the

service are defined and monitored through a clear service level agreement.

- The local authority seeks user feedback on their experience of its duty and assessment services which informs service development.
- Senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the service. This has led to improved resourcing and informed the recent team re-structuring.

Areas for development

- Although there are some examples of children's ethnicity and diverse needs being considered in assessment and care planning, this is not undertaken systematically in all cases. This was an area for development from the last unannounced inspection.
- The quality of analysis in assessments is too variable. Whilst risk is generally identified this is not always balanced by appropriate weighting of protective factors. The weaknesses in analysis mean that some child protection plans are not sufficiently clear about the improvements required and how these will be achieved.
- In a number of cases seen by inspectors the case recording was not up-to-date or sufficiently comprehensive.
- Initial assessments for children in need are not commenced in a timely manner following the receipt of a referral. In some cases this leads to difficulties in effectively engaging parents and to delays in children and young people receiving services.
- Whilst staff have day-to-day access to management advice and direction some are not receiving regular good quality supervision. Supervision files seen were of a poor quality and supervision processes were not subject to consistent auditing.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicholas McMullen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Andrew Spencer, Department for Education