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Mr John Gilbert  
Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Swindon Borough Council  
Sanford House  
Sanford Street  
Swindon SN1 1QH

Dear Mr Gilbert

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Swindon Borough 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 Swindon Borough Council which was conducted on 8 and 9 July 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; 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:

- Management decision-making within the referral and assessment team is sound and timely, child protection processes are secure and effective action is taken to protect children at risk of harm.



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- Senior managers and elected members regularly scrutinise safeguarding arrangements and managers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Prompt action has been taken to address the difficulties in recording and tracking the progress of work that have arisen during the recent implementation of the Integrated Children’s System, although this action has not yet had an impact.
- The standard of initial assessments reviewed during this inspection was at least satisfactory.
- There is a core group of competent and experienced social workers in the referral and assessment team. Staff, including newly qualified social workers, are supported well. Supervision arrangements are satisfactory and newly appointed staff receive good induction.
- Thresholds for social care intervention are understood by partner agencies and are implemented consistently.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Excellent partnership working contributes well to safeguarding children.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Arrangements for assessing children’s needs through the common assessment framework (CAF) are well developed and CAF assessments reviewed during this inspection were good.</li> <li>○ Good integrated working ensures effective support for children and families who do not meet the criteria for social care services.</li> <li>○ Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) arrangements ensure good information sharing and effective intervention for families where children are affected by domestic violence.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Nearly all core assessments seen during this inspection are good and have been undertaken in a timely manner. These demonstrate good reflective social work practice and partnership working.</li> <li>▪ Arrangements for assessment and safeguarding of disabled children are effective and reflect good partnership working.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children are not always seen alone when social workers are undertaking initial assessments.</li> </ul>

- Case records are not sufficiently up-to-date nor is management information sufficiently accurate to enable tracking and monitoring of cases and the progress of work. It is not always possible to identify the outcome of cases from the records.
- Timescales for initial assessments are not reported in line with the requirements in that they are reported as being completed before they are written up.
- There are long delays in writing up initial assessments and therefore in formal approval by managers, although in the vast majority of cases, children are seen and action is taken promptly. This has the potential to leave children vulnerable.

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: Gavin Jones, Chief Executive, Swindon Borough Council  
John Gilbert, Chair of Swindon Safeguarding Children Board  
Garry Perkins, Lead Member for Children's Services, Swindon Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families