

17 June 2010

Ms J Almond
Telford and Wrekin Council
Civic Offices
Coach Central
Telford
TF3 4HD

Dear Ms Almond

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Telford and Wrekin 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 18 and 19 May 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 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">Consistently good joint working practice is evident between the duty and assessment service, the police and health staff in child protection enquiries. Effective working relationships are also in evidence with schools in the Team around the Child processes.The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is well established and evidenced by high quality CAF assessments and plans.



- The Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board promotes effective partnership working across the borough to address the safeguarding needs of local children. For example, a multi-agency initiative has been developed to provide a comprehensive service to support children and young people who have been victims of sexual exploitation and those at risk of becoming victims.
- Senior managers have a good understanding of the performance of the safeguarding team and are committed to improving practice. Following extensive work by external consultants, a robust improvement plan is being implemented. The plan is monitored regularly by the corporate management team and additional resources, including new social worker posts, have been agreed as a result.

Satisfactory practice

- All child protection investigations are promptly allocated to, and carried out by, qualified social workers.
- Management oversight and decision-making for cases are generally satisfactory. Audits of casework quality are undertaken by managers at key points, including when cases are transferred to other teams or at closure. Arrangements are also in place to ensure regular random case file audits by senior and first line managers.
- Thresholds for access to children's social care services are well understood and operate effectively across partner agencies.
- Consultation is regularly undertaken with service users to ascertain their views about the services provided.
- Staff have access to consistent formal supervision and to relevant training. Newly qualified social workers have access to the national pilot scheme which offers a range of development opportunities, an appropriate and manageable caseload and additional management support.
- Experienced first-line managers are readily available to offer informal support and guidance to social work staff.
- The out-of-hours service takes appropriate action to safeguard children and communicates effectively with daytime services.

Areas for development

- Screening systems for contacts and referrals are not sufficiently robust. In some children in need cases, decision-making is not made within set timescales and previous history or wider contextual issues are not always taken into account. This potentially places some children at risk. The authority is aware of this and

plans are in place to improve practice.

- Social worker capacity is limited and caseloads are generally high. At the time of the inspection 13 referrals for child in need services were unallocated. There is no clear system in place for assessing risk or prioritising the relative needs of these cases.
- The quality of assessments is variable. In many cases, robust analysis of factors impacting on the well-being of the child is limited. In child protection cases, risk assessments are generally satisfactory but in child in need cases, they are insufficiently rigorous.
- Although there are some good examples of children's ethnicity and diverse needs being considered in assessment and planning, this is not undertaken systematically in all cases.
- The majority of case recording of contacts with children and families and other professionals are not up-to-date. Similarly the recording of management oversight, decision-making and the record of supervision is not routinely transferred to the electronic case record. However, initial contact and referral information and subsequent assessments are recorded in a timely manner.
- In some cases seen, the views of children and young people are well represented. However, in others it is unclear how children are engaged in the assessment process and whether their views are taken into account in decision-making.
- Although all children and young people requiring a service are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers, not all staff involved in the initial screening of referrals are sufficiently qualified to undertake this task. Managers are aware of this and have plans in place to resolve this deficit.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, Telford and Wrekin Council
Chris Brannan, Chair of Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Stephen Burrell, Lead Member for Children's Services, Telford and Wrekin Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education