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Mr Michael Jameson  
Assistant Executive Director of Children and Young People  
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Level 10 Civic Centre  
West Street  
Oldham  
OL1 1XJ

Dear Mr Jameson

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Oldham Metropolitan Borough 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 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 January 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 areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in May 2010 have been considered during this inspection. Improvement has been made in one area and although there is evidence of progress in procuring a new computer system and a project plan is in place, this continues to be an area for development.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The arrangements to safeguard children effectively capture the diverse multicultural needs in the local community. For example, an innovative project group, supported by the Local Safeguarding Children Board, provides training and raises awareness of safeguarding issues within mosques and madrasahs. The staff group in the children's assessment teams reflect the local community and there is a clear understanding of the diverse needs of children in assessment.</li> <li>▪ Senior managers have embedded a comprehensive system of quality assurance. This includes a robust and well established programme undertaken by all managers evaluating the quality of assessments. Regular themed audits are carried out and outcomes are routinely reported to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This has been highly effective at identifying issues, enabling a prompt and thorough response to ensure continual improvements in practice.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In all cases seen by inspectors, children at risk of immediate harm were appropriately safeguarded and responded to in accordance with statutory guidance and by suitably qualified workers.</li> <li>▪ Strategy meetings are timely and are well attended by a range of professionals known to the child. Strong working relationships are evident with the Greater Manchester Police Child Abuse Investigation team.</li> <li>▪ A very high percentage of initial and core assessments are completed within timescales.</li> <li>▪ There is clear evidence of improvement in the quality of assessments with the inclusion of a more focused analysis that identifies risks and positive factors. In the majority of cases seen there were clear records of decisions. This was an area for development from the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Inter-agency working is evident in assessments. Social workers routinely consult with other agencies and there is prompt sharing of information to safeguard children.</li> <li>▪ The views of children and young people are consistently sought and recorded in assessments and inform their outcome.</li> <li>▪ The children with disability team and the aftercare service work alongside the children's assessment teams when undertaking child protection enquires. This has resulted in families receiving a coordinated service that ensures a clear</li> </ul>

focus on safeguarding children and a recognition of their diverse needs.

- The use of common assessment framework continues to develop with increased numbers undertaken.
- The emergency duty team (EDT) provide timely information to children's assessment teams on work undertaken. There is close collaboration between the teams and the good practice of undertaking 'safe and well' visits by EDT.
- There is reliable reporting of domestic violence from a range of partner agencies and well considered decision making results in a consistent response by children's assessment teams to these referrals.
- Staff report that they are well supported by managers who are readily available for support and advice.

#### **Areas for development**

- Some written records are incomplete and do not accurately reflect work undertaken in regard to discussions with other professionals. The council has accepted this concern and has stated they will issue an instruction to all staff to ensure that recording meets the local and national standards.
- Supervision with all staff is regularly undertaken; however there is inconsistency between the two teams in regard to the extent of challenge and reflective practice. No annual appraisals had taken place in one team therefore staff learning needs do not contribute to the overall training plan.
- Not all case records are easily accessible, with some records split between paper files and electronic recording. The local authority plans to improve this through the procurement of a new computer system by May 2012. This was an area for development from the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

**Pauline Turner**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Charlie Parker, Chief Executive, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Jim Leivers, Chair of Oldham Safeguarding Children Board  
Councillor Jack Hulme, Lead Member for Children's Services, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education