

11 June 2010

Mr Michael Jameson
Assistant Executive Director, Children and Young People
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Level 10 Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham
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Dear Mr Jameson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council children's services

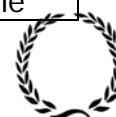
This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 May 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the 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">▪ Workloads are manageable and assessments are completed in a timely way to ensure children are safeguarded and receive the services they need. A very high proportion of both initial and core assessments are completed within the



statutory timescales.

- Senior managers take appropriate measures to ensure that referral and assessment processes are effective. These include regular file auditing overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and reporting to the Corporate Safeguarding Accountability Panel. The findings from audit activity are shared with staff and lead to improvements in practice and the quality of service delivery.
- Good communication and collaborative multi-agency working contribute to clear assessments and plans. For example, the after care team works closely with a range of key agencies, while the innovative 'messenger' partnership with Barnardos, police and health produces good outcomes for vulnerable young people.
- Staff report good support from their managers who are available for advice, offer regular supervision, and closely monitor the quality and progress of assessment work, all of which contributes to appropriate decisions.
- Newly qualified social workers are well supported through an induction programme, protected caseloads and focused supervision with their managers.
- The diverse needs of children and families are considered well in assessments. The diversity of the staff group reflects the make up of the local community and communication needs are addressed through specialist staff in each team. There are effective links with mosques and minority ethnic community groups.

Satisfactory practice

- Thresholds for access to services are consistently applied and referrers receive a response about the outcome of their referral.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is steadily developing across the authority with improving multi-agency networking. Robust systems are in place to monitor the progress of each CAF and the CAF co-ordinator has access to management support from an experienced child protection specialist.
- Children and families are routinely involved in assessments. Some assessments, including assessments of children with a disability, were of a high standard, demonstrating clear analysis and the use of relevant research and assessment tools. An effective risk assessment tool is used to support core assessments and in most cases the balance between risk and protective factors is assessed well.
- Where child protection concerns are identified, strategy discussions are held appropriately with other agencies and child protection enquiries are conducted in a timely manner.
- Record keeping is up to date. Out of hours duty arrangements are linked well to

the day service. Senior managers are available for consultation out of hours and have access to the computer records.

- All cases are allocated and dealt with by appropriately qualified and experienced workers.
- Relevant training covering all aspects of safeguarding is provided by the LSCB and training is reviewed and refreshed to take account of new policy and practice initiatives and the developmental needs of staff.

Areas for development

- Some initial assessments contain too much narrative. A sharper focus on the analysis and decisions would support the delivery of more effective outcomes for children and families.
- 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Hackeson
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