

30 December 2011

Ms Elaine McHale  
Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Wakefield Council  
County Hall  
Wakefield  
WF1 2HQ

Dear Ms McHale

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wakefield 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 Wakefield Council which was conducted on 28 and 29 November 2011. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to next year's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating. 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 an area of strength, areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Six of the seven areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements undertaken in July 2010 have been addressed. The practice of the police carrying out initial criminal enquiries and interviews with children in child protection investigations before holding strategy discussions with Wakefield Children's Services remains an area for development.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The multi-agency early intervention team effectively promotes and supports the common assessment framework (CAF) activity across all agencies. This</li></ul>



includes the provision of advice with complex cases, effective early intervention with the minority ethnic, Traveller and Roma communities, training and quality assurance. The views of children and their families have been used well to improve provision. The high volume of CAF work has successfully diverted children and their families from children's social care services.

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

- All contacts and referrals are screened by qualified social workers in the Social Care Direct Team and managers make appropriate and timely decisions. The team operates an out-of-hours service which enables a 24 hour response to requests for assistance from families and professionals.
- Inter-agency thresholds are well established across the partnership and regular dialogue between agencies and the CAF team ensure that there is continual review of and improvement in referral practice.
- The quality of assessments is satisfactory overall with some good work observed by inspectors. Most assessments are clear and suitably identify risk and protective factors.
- Child protection enquiries are thorough, timely and carried out by qualified and suitably experienced social workers.
- The diverse needs of children and their families are appropriately addressed and recorded within assessments. Most children are seen alone, when appropriate, and their wishes and feelings are taken into account.
- Most record keeping is up to date and the introduction of the new electronic recording system enables staff to complete their records efficiently.
- A systematic quality assurance framework that includes regular and themed audits of practice along with implementation of learning from serious case reviews is used to improve and inform practice.
- Staff are supported by visible and experienced managers and receive regular supervision.
- Staff have good access to well-regarded training and development opportunities which has led to improved staff retention.
- Newly qualified social workers benefit from protected caseloads and access to appropriate and specifically designed training and development opportunities.
- Child protection procedures are easily accessible, well understood and appropriately implemented.

### Areas for development

- A significant number of initial assessments and some core assessments are not completed in a timely way which impacts on ensuring that children and their families receive an effective service when they most need it. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Strategy discussions do not always take place between police and social care teams prior to the commencement of child protection enquiries. This is not in accordance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010*. This does not promote effective working relationships and consequently plans for the completion of enquires are not sufficiently comprehensive. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

**Helen Humphreys**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Joanne Roney, Chief Executive, Wakefield Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education