

13 April 2011

Mr Andy Couldrick  
General Manager Children's Services  
Wokingham Borough Council  
PO Box 156  
Shute End  
Wokingham  
RG40 1WQ

Dear Mr Couldrick

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wokingham 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 Wokingham Borough Council which was conducted on 15 and 16 March 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.

Some of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in September 2009 are met.

The areas of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in September 2009 are met.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The council has implemented an effective workforce development strategy that</li></ul>



has improved significantly the stability of the workforce. The recruitment of permanent social work staff and managers, a reduction in the use of agency staff, improved sickness absence levels and good access to relevant training opportunities ensure that services to children and their families are delivered in a timely way by highly motivated and well-trained staff with good management direction.

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

- Referrals receive a prompt response with appropriate management oversight. Management decisions are clearly recorded in case files. Child protection procedures are understood and applied by staff and managers consistently to ensure the safety of children and young people.
- Most assessments are completed in line with statutory timescales, ensuring that services are delivered in a timely way.
- Section 47 enquiries are thorough and carried out by suitably qualified and experienced social workers. Children suffering or at risk of harm are identified and receive an appropriate response.
- Inter-agency communication and working are mostly effective and thresholds are agreed and applied consistently. Use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is well-established across partner agencies, integrated within a thresholds framework and provides a wide range of preventive services.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear and robust. All those undertaking child protection work are suitably qualified and experienced social workers who have access to the council's electronic social care record system. This ensures that children and their families receive an appropriate response that is consistent with that provided by daytime services.
- The council has recently implemented robust audit and performance management arrangements that enable managers at all levels to monitor and challenge casework and decision-making and to improve service delivery. However the full impact of these improvements is yet to be realised.
- Social workers value regular supervision and report that it allows for critical reflection and challenge and supports effective delivery to safeguard and meet the needs of children and families.
- Staff workloads are manageable and arrangements for the transfer of cases effective, enabling a timely response that safeguards children. There are no unallocated cases.

### Areas for development

- The quality of assessments remains too variable. While some examples of adequate and good assessments were seen, most are descriptive and lack sufficient analysis of need. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. While there is evidence of some progress, further development is needed to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Some case recording does not include the activity and analysis that has taken place. In particular discussions about the balance of risks, protective factors and needs are not always evident and in consequence the effectiveness of planning in individual cases cannot be identified.
- The views of children and their families are not consistently taken into account in assessments. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- The identity, ethnicity, religious and cultural needs of children and their families are not always considered in assessments. The ethnicity of children and family members is not consistently recorded on case files. This was an area for development at the previous 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

**Simon Rushall**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Susan Law, Chief Executive, Wokingham Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education