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Mr Cliff Turner
Director of Children's Services
The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council
Town Hall
St Ives Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 1RF

Dear Mr Turner

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead 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 the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council which was conducted on 9 and 10 August 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 April 2010 have mostly been met. Whilst there is evidence of progress having been made, areas for development remain, specifically the variable quality of chronologies and the embedding of the common assessment framework.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workforce stability within the referral and assessment team has been well secured through a robust retention package for social workers resulting in a three year minimum commitment to work for the council. This has led to a full complement of well trained, experienced and permanently employed staff within the referral and assessment team offering a high standard of continuity to service users and improved partnership working. ▪ The consistent quality of risk analysis seen in core assessments and child protection investigations leads to clearly defined identification of risk and protective factors within families. Core assessments undertaken by qualified social workers based in the Family Centre are exceptionally comprehensive and analytical and are well supported by reference to research. As a result, decisions are firmly evidenced and well informed leading to sharply focused care planning.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The arrangements for receiving and responding to contacts and referrals combined with good management oversight result in timely and effective decision making and a consistent application of thresholds. ▪ Management decisions are clearly and routinely recorded in case files which provide a comprehensive decision making and case instruction audit trail. ▪ Child protection is appropriately prioritised to ensure children and young people are protected when at risk of significant harm. All child protection cases are allocated to qualified social workers. All initial child protection case conferences are held within the required statutory timescale. ▪ Positive working relationships with the police result in timely decisions being made about children at risk of significant harm with joint investigations being carried out effectively. ▪ Managers have direct access to the Thames Valley Police Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference database. As a result, information sharing is strengthened leading to improved protection arrangements for children and families. ▪ All children are seen as part of the assessment process. Parents' and children's views are clearly incorporated into assessment of need. Completed assessments are routinely shared with families and professionals. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.

- The quality of assessments seen by inspectors is good. However, a small minority are not always completed on a timely basis.
- Ethnicity is routinely recorded and there are some good examples where the diverse needs of children have been sensitively and effectively met. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- Cases are allocated promptly with no unallocated cases at the time of the inspection. Social work caseloads are manageable with staff in some areas reporting a reduction since the previous inspection. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- The newly qualified social work programme is well regarded by staff. This leads to newly qualified social workers receiving appropriate support, training and protected caseloads.
- Effective arrangements are in place for the timely throughput of work from the referral and assessment team to longer term teams.
- Accessible and effective management support is readily available and valued by social work staff. Supervision is provided on an appropriately frequent basis to reflect the demands and nature of referral and assessment work. However, the recording of supervision sessions is inconsistent.
- Staff benefit from good opportunities for training and development. Lessons from serious case reviews are appropriately disseminated.
- A good range of audit activity is undertaken including individual file and themed audits. All case files are routinely audited prior to transfer to longer term teams. File audits by senior managers are routinely undertaken to ensure standards are met and to improve practice.
- Out of hours arrangements are robust with good information sharing and accessibility of managers from the daytime service which ensure effective interventions.

Areas for development

- The common assessment framework (CAF) remains underdeveloped and under-utilised resulting in insufficient use being made of the CAF to support referrals to children's social care and to provide robust planning and reviewing for ongoing support from universal service after interventions by children's social care. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- In some cases, the decision to gather further information following a referral instead of conducting an initial assessment is inappropriate and results in a

delay in completion of work and unnecessary management oversight.

- The quality of chronologies and case recording is variable which makes it difficult in some case cases to ascertain the family history from reading the file. The variable quality of chronologies was an area for development at the previous unannounced 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

Chris Sands
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Ian Trenholm, Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education