

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

6 JUNE 2012

SUBJECT:	ANNUAL UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CONTACT, REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN WIRRAL COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The second unannounced inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Wirral Council was conducted by OFSTED on 1st and 2nd February 2012. The letter setting out the findings of this inspection is attached to this report.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 The national regime of annual OFSTED inspections: Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements commenced in June 2009. The inspections are carried out under Section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The inspection contributes to the annual review of performance of the authority's children's services.

2.2 The inspection in Wirral was one of the last conducted in the second round of inspections nationally. Wirral has used the outcomes and 'Areas for Development' identified in its previous Unannounced Inspection, conducted on the 20th and 21st July 2010, the outcome of its Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection, conducted in February 2011 and the inspection framework published by OFSTED to constructively assess and embed good practice. The Department has adopted a performance improvement approach, monitored through monthly operational thematic groups such as the Contact, Referral and Assessment Meetings and the Care Management and Resources Meeting. This has involved a wide range of operational managers, off line auditors and support officers directly involved in the service. Team specific plans have been presented and updated at each meeting, which have focused on the processes in place, the throughput of work and the quality of assessments. Many relevant policies and procedures have been updated and briefed out to staff.

2.3 The inspection is unannounced, and the lead inspector contacts the local authority prior to nine o'clock on the day of the inspection to announce their arrival. In Wirral the two inspectors visited three of the four Assessment Teams, the Central Advice and Duty Team (CADT), and the Children with a Disability Team. Inspectors also met with Area Team Leaders, the CAF / Quality Assurance Manager and spoke with the Emergency Duty Team Manager. During the inspection 63 files and 10 staff supervision files were seen. The Director, Head of Branch and Strategic Service Managers were fully informed

throughout the inspection. The inspectors fed back their findings on the afternoon of the second day of the inspection. The inspectors were professional, skilled and sensitive to local issues. Members of staff felt they engaged in constructive and knowledgeable discussion about their work.

- 2.4 Inspectors reported that the 'Areas for Development' identified in the previous Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements in July 2010 and the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection in February 2011 have been subject to a robust action plan to deliver improvements. Marked progress has been made in the majority of areas although there remains work to be done around the current electronic recording arrangements and the need to ensure that all records of assessments, plans and review reflect the cultural and identity needs of children and their families. Also the quality and frequency of supervision remained variable.
- 2.5 The inspectors identified two areas of strength; it was acknowledged by inspectors that this was fewer than in the previous inspection, but that this reflected a markedly higher standard that had been set following the first round of inspections.
- 2.6 Thirteen areas of satisfactory practice were identified, defined by OFSTED as "practice and arrangements that meet the requirements of statutory guidance", which included core expectations such as responding appropriately to the needs of children identified as being at risk or, or suffering significant harm.
- 2.7 Five 'Areas for Development' were identified, these are:
 - improvements are required in recording and giving full consideration to the ethnicity and cultural needs of children, young people and families in assessments, plans and reviews. The inspectors noted that there had been improvements in this area since the last inspection
 - improvements are required in the timeliness of both initial and core assessments. Inspectors noted that there was a robust system in place for senior managers to be informed of the issues in this area
 - the quality and frequency of supervision and annual appraisal was variable
 - the workloads of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW's) and the complexity of work was not always commensurate with their level of experience. The inspectors noted the proactive action that had been taken in one assessment team to address this issue.
 - the Integrated Children's System remains cumbersome and not all templates are user friendly, while progress has been made in this area further work is required.
- 2.8 This is a positive inspection, and reflects the hard work by staff and managers to improve services for children and families. This is a challenging area of working requiring constant vigilance and attention, which will be sustained through a constant focus on maintaining and improving services still further, for some of the most vulnerable children in Wirral.
- 2.9 An action plan has been developed to address the areas for development but also some of the more general areas for improvement. The plan is attached to this report.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 The provision of excellent contact, referral and assessment services for children in need, at risk of significant harm or who have experienced significant harm is an area of work demanding constant attention, monitoring and oversight. The inspection has confirmed that good systems are in place to do this; however, there can never be any room for complacency. It is an area of considerable risk.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 No other options were considered as this was an external inspection undertaken by the regulator of social care, OFSTED.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 The findings of the inspection were briefed out to all managers involved in the inspection on the day the feedback was received, and subsequently to a wider audience of Social Care staff members.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 There are no direct implications associated with this report.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however In order to sustain improvements in the service it is important that a full staffing complement is maintained.

7.2 The action plan recommends the review of the capacity of the electronic recording system which will involve WITS. There may be a need to purchase services from the current provider Northgate (or an alternative provider) given there are likely to be further changes made following the Munro review into child protection. This review is to critically exam if the current IT systems are fit for purpose.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review can be found at the link below:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/children-young-people>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct implications associated with this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Providing good quality contact, referral and assessment systems directly impacts on safety within the community, through the identification of risks which are assessed and mitigated through the provision of appropriately targeted services.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 Members are requested to note the outcome of the February 2012 OFSTED Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 OFSTED is the regulator for children's social care services under the Children Act 2004 and will be responsible, through subsequent inspections, for monitoring ongoing compliance with statutory duties. Members have a responsibility to assure themselves that the council is taking appropriate action in addressing the areas for development identified by OFSTED.

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APPENDICES

Contact, referral and assessment action plan 2012

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Letter dated 1ST March 2012 from HMI Mary Candlin: Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council children's services.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	21 ST MARCH 2011
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	20 TH SEPTEMBER 2011
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	1 ST JUNE 2011
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	14 th SEPTEMBER 2010