

27 July 2011

Mr Michael O'Connor  
Director Of Children's Services  
Westminster City Council  
Westminster City Hall  
64 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1E 6QP

Dear Mr O'Connor

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Westminster City 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 Westminster City Council which was conducted on 28 and 29 June 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 and other practitioners

The inspection identified an area of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Of the seven areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in September 2010 one is still to be completed.

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

<b>Strength</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Service users' views are routinely sought and used well to influence service delivery.</li></ul>



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

- Initial and core assessments, and child protection enquiries are completed in a timely way and are undertaken by qualified workers. The undertaking of some initial assessments by social work assistants was an area for development at the previous inspection but this is no longer the case.
- Section 47 enquiries are conducted in a timely manner, managers liaise effectively with partner agencies and their decision making and oversight is consistent.
- Social workers take appropriate account of children's and families' views when conducting their assessments.
- Child protection services for children with disabilities are implemented effectively with clear assessments and appropriate protective arrangements in place..
- Case files include comprehensive chronologies. This was an area for development from the previous inspection.
- Clear arrangements are in place for the transfer of cases from the duty and assessment team.
- Training and support to partner agencies in integrated working systems has resulted in increased use of the common assessment framework (CAF) and team around the child processes. Consequently, families are now receiving a wider range of early intervention and lower level support services when they do not meet the criteria for social care. The increased use of CAF was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Information regarding ethnicity is consistently recorded on referrals. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- The stability and morale of the staff in the duty and assessment team is good, with a low rate of staff turnover.
- Social workers have manageable caseloads which assists them in delivering a timely service.
- Staff, spoken to during the inspection, report that they receive regular supervision and have frequent access to informal advice and support which enables them to improve their practice and deliver a quality service.
- Supervision notes are now routinely recorded on case files. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

- Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and have access to training opportunities which enable them to deliver an appropriate service.
- Learning from serious case reviews is well disseminated to enhance awareness and practice.
- Audits by senior managers are effective in identifying and improving practice and service delivery.

#### **Areas for development**

- Too many assessments lack sufficient analysis which results in some recommendations that are not based on clear evidence.
- While children and families' ethnicity and culture is recorded, it is not always used to inform assessments. As a result, families do not consistently receive services that take account of their cultural needs.
- Other agencies regularly send to the referral and assessment team contacts and notifications which do not meet the agreed threshold for statutory intervention. This adds significantly to workload and inappropriately diverts management attention from other key tasks.
- Out of hours arrangements for receiving and responding to open cases are effective but information on new referrals from the emergency duty team to the duty and assessment team is not always sufficiently comprehensive to enable staff to make decisions in a timely way.
- The Integrated Children's System does not facilitate sufficiently comprehensive record keeping to enable effective management oversight and accurate information. Although the council is in the process of addressing this issue, it remains outstanding from 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

**Geoff Corre**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Mike More, Chief Executive, Westminster City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education