

7 July 2011

Mr Paul Robinson  
Director of Children's Services  
London Borough of Wandsworth Council  
Third Floor, Town Hall Extension  
Wandsworth High Street  
London  
SW18 2PU

Dear Mr Robinson

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Wandsworth 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 London Borough of Wandsworth Council which was conducted on 8 and 9 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, 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 June 2010 have all been satisfactorily addressed.

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

**Strengths**

- Performance management is strongly embedded within the service and is employed to achieve and sustain very good service standards. High quality management information is easily available and well used by managers to



ensure cases are effectively progressed. This has ensured sustained good performance in the timeliness of assessments. Themes and issues from quality audits are clearly identified and analysed and lead to actions which drive service improvement.

- Social workers receive highly effective management support and oversight, which combined with manageable workloads, enables them to feel safe and supported in their work with vulnerable children and to produce consistently good quality casework. One outcome from this is that re-referral rates are consistently below the national average.

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

- Appropriate inter-agency thresholds have been agreed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and are applied consistently by referring agencies and by managers within the initial response service.
- Children at risk of, or suffering, significant harm are identified and responded to promptly and robustly.
- Child protection enquiries are planned through timely strategy discussions and conducted thoroughly by suitably experienced and qualified social workers. Findings in relation to significant harm are clear and lead to appropriate actions to ensure children's safety.
- Case recording is generally comprehensive and up to date.
- Initial contact workers provide good advice and guidance which effectively signposts families to a range of support services.
- Early intervention services are well established with widespread use of team around the child meetings. Social care managers provide good support and advice to these meetings.
- In most cases assessments are clear and take account of historical information and input from partner agencies. Conclusions flow logically from the use of analysis and support the development of clear and effective plans.
- Children are always seen by social workers during the assessment process and in most cases their views are recorded and taken account of in the assessment outcome.
- Multi-agency pre-birth meetings, convened by the hospital social work team, are used to ensure effective planning, where there are concerns about unborn babies.
- The children with disabilities team operate their own duty system which ensures new referrals of disabled children receive good quality assessments which take full account of any safeguarding needs.
- The local authority has developed a number of specialist roles within its service

to address the specific needs of particular children such as unaccompanied minors, children in families without recourse to public funds and privately fostered children. This ensures that the needs of these children are identified and responded to effectively.

- Partnership working is consistently strong with all key partner agencies. This ensures there is good multi-agency engagement in assessment and care planning for individual children.
- The local authority has a pro-active and positive approach to gathering user feedback. Service user views are routinely collected and used to inform service evaluation. The most recent evaluation showed generally high levels of satisfaction with social work services.
- Out of hours duty arrangements ensure children with child protection needs are responded to satisfactorily and are well linked to daytime services.
- Social workers receive regular supervision from experienced managers. This includes the use of critical reflection and, when required, positive challenge.
- Staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their roles with good levels of workforce stability and limited use of agency workers. Workers also access a range of relevant training courses.

#### **Areas for development**

- Children's ethnicity is not clearly identified in all cases and most assessments lack sufficient attention to needs arising from culture or ethnicity. The local authority's own audit has identified this shortfall and plans are being developed to address this.
- Inspectors saw a small number of cases where initial work, undertaken by non social work qualified staff, was recorded as an initial assessment. This work was not sufficiently thorough and, as a result, some young people were receiving services not informed by a clear assessment of their needs. The local authority agreed to take action to remedy this situation.

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

Yours sincerely

**Nicholas McMullen**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Paul Martin, Chief Executive, London Borough of Wandsworth  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education