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Mr Stephen Richards  
Joint Acting Director of Children, Young People and Learning  
London Borough of Sutton Council  
The Grove  
Carshalton  
Surrey  
SM5 3AL

Dear Mr Richards

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Sutton 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 Sutton Council which was conducted on 5 and 6 April 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 May 2010 are being addressed within an action plan. Good attention has been paid to address workload issues and in most other areas progress is satisfactory although some measures taken have yet to demonstrate sufficient and sustained impact.



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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children and their families with lower levels of assessed need benefit from a wide range of early intervention and prevention services supported and accessed through well established common assessment framework processes. This successfully enables early assistance and support to be provided to families to improve their circumstances thereby avoiding the need for other forms of intervention to safeguard children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Good co-ordinated multi-agency services for children and young people with disabilities is provided through the multi-agency team which includes two occupational therapists, a specialist nurse for complex and continuing care, and a child and adolescent mental health worker with specialist knowledge to work with children and young people on the autistic spectrum.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practice and procedures conform to statutory requirements in most key aspects to ensure the safety of children and young people. In a small number of child in need cases there is delay while additional information is sought to inform appropriate decision making by managers.</li> <li>▪ Revised arrangements for the screening of all initial contacts within the Children's Access Team (CAT) enables the consistent application of agreed inter-agency threshold criteria and facilitates appropriate signposting to other services.</li> <li>▪ Regular liaison between the CAT, health and education professionals promotes inter-agency understanding of thresholds ensuring children and families receive appropriate services.</li> <li>▪ Child protection enquiries are undertaken by staff who are suitably qualified and experienced.</li> <li>▪ The quality of analysis within assessments is generally adequate and in a number of cases very good. Such assessments regularly ensure the views of children and young people are considered and taken into account leading to the effective identification of needs.</li> <li>▪ Good attention has been given to ensure that caseloads are manageable evidenced by improvements in the completion of initial and core assessments within required timescales. This means that the needs of children, young people and their families are met in a timely manner.</li> <li>▪ Arrangements for the transfer of cases to long term teams are clear, flexible and effectively implemented. This means that children and young people do</li> </ul>

not experience unacceptable delays in the continuity of services they receive.

- The Referral and Assessment Service contributes and supports safeguarding activity within multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) through attendance by designated senior managers. Such activity supports the appropriate sharing of information and multi-agency planning to safeguard children and young people.
- Staff have access to training to meet their professional development needs and feel they are supported well in their work by knowledgeable and experienced managers who are accessible for case discussions and advice.
- Newly qualified social workers are well supported; they have protected caseloads and have access to additional supervision and training through the newly qualified social work programme.
- The majority of case records and assessments reflect the impact and relevance of culture, ethnicity or beliefs when considering the needs of children and young people. There is good access to interpretation and translation services to enable effective communication with service users.
- Out of hours duty arrangements are effective and appropriately linked to the daytime referral processes.

#### **Areas for development**

- Although a range of quality audits, case monitoring and performance assessment mechanisms have been developed to identify and report on the effectiveness of service provision there is still insufficient managerial oversight of the work of front line practitioners. This was a previous area for development.
- Supervision is not consistently recorded on case files and in some instances regularity of supervision is not compliant with the authority's own policy. This was a previous area for development.
- The electronic case record system does not support front line workers or their managers to meet the needs of children and young people most efficiently. Information, decisions and records can be held in more than one place making it difficult to readily access records or quickly gain an overview of the current work being undertaken.
- Performance for holding initial child protection conferences within 15 days is poor. Whilst there has been no evidence that children are being placed at risk as a result, there are known capacity issues inhibiting compliance with statutory requirements that are actively being addressed by senior managers.
- A disproportionate amount of administrative, social work and managerial time

is taken up in the CAT managing the high volume of notifications from the police, many of which do not lead to, nor require, intervention from children's social care services. This matter is currently being addressed by senior managers within children's social care and the police.

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

Yours sincerely

**Sean Tarpey**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Niall Bolger, Chief Executive, London Borough of Sutton Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education