

2 March 2011

Ms Romi Bowen  
Director of Children's Services  
London Borough of Southwark  
Mabel Goldwin House  
49 Grange Walk  
London  
SE1 3DY

Dear Ms Bowen

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Southwark 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 Southwark Council which was conducted on 1 and 2 February 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 areas for development.

All but one area of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in April 2010 have been addressed. Further work is required to embed the common assessment framework (CAF) across children's services in the borough.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Wide-ranging and innovative quality assurance systems, involving staff at all</li></ul>



levels, demonstrate the service's commitment to prioritising organisational learning and promoting individual and service development. This approach has contributed to the high morale within an increasingly stable workforce in the Referral and Assessment Service.

- Structural developments to the service, such as the establishment of the co-located pre-birth assessment team, have considerably strengthened multi-agency working, enabling a sensitive response to the diverse needs of the most vulnerable children and families, with a sharp focus on timely information sharing and early intervention.

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

- Referrals are responded to promptly and identified risk is managed effectively in order to safeguard and support vulnerable children, assisted by procedures which comply with statutory requirements.
- Assessments are timely. The majority are sufficiently detailed and analytical, and some assessments are good. Risk and protective factors are outlined clearly, leading to effective plans.
- Equality and diversity issues are consistently taken into account during assessment and casework planning.
- Recently revised thresholds for access to services have been agreed across agencies which aim to support continued progress in ensuring referrals are appropriate and of sufficient quality.
- Children are routinely seen, and their views considered during assessment to inform plans and the delivery of services.
- Child protection enquiries are undertaken appropriately, by qualified social workers, with evidence of good examples of strategy discussions with key agencies, including the police.
- Record-keeping is up-to-date and sufficiently detailed. There is evidence of effective management oversight, including timely case supervision recording that provides clear directions for practitioners.
- Staff, including newly qualified social workers, report that they receive regular formal supervision and that they are well supported by a visible and accessible management team.
- Out-of-hours arrangements are effective, with good links to daytime services that ensures work is followed up effectively.
- Caseloads are manageable and monitored effectively to support staff. This is supported by the current service structure, which provides the necessary

flexibility to meet fluctuations in demand.

- Training is accessible and valued by staff. Lessons from serious case reviews are acted upon and applied in practice.

#### **Areas for development**

- A high proportion of child protection enquiries do not result in initial child protection conferences and a significantly low number of initial conferences result in a child becoming subject to a child protection plan. This requires further investigation to ensure that resources are being used efficiently and that children and families are not subjected to unnecessary statutory intervention.
- Implementation of the CAF remains underdeveloped. Further work is required to ensure the consistent contribution of all key agencies and to prevent the involvement of children's social care where it is not necessary or appropriate.

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

Yours sincerely

**Matthew Brazier**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Annie Shepperd, Chief Executive, London Borough of Southwark Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education