

23 December 2009

Mr Nick Whitfield  
Director of Education and Children's Services  
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames  
1st Floor  
Regal House  
London Road  
Twickenham  
TW1 3QB

Dear Mr Whitfield

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Children's Services**

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames which was conducted on 25 and 26 November. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Arrangements for responding to contacts and referrals are effective and timely, with appropriate decision making by managers.
- Child protection cases are identified well and responded to appropriately and in a timely way.



- Children are seen alone and their views taken into account and appropriately recorded in assessments.
- Families are appropriately involved in assessment and care planning with consideration in most cases given to their ethnic, religious and cultural needs.
- Initial and core assessments are of mainly good quality and their timeliness is above the national average.
- Arrangements for the provision of the out of hours social work service are clear and well integrated.
- The Common Assessment Framework is being used effectively in work to improve outcomes for children in need, with appropriate targets for further development.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social workers are well supported by their managers and effectively communicate, leading to good staff morale. Frequent and good quality supervision is provided to staff with effective managerial oversight of decisions on cases.</li> <li>▪ Effective partnership working across all agencies, including the police child abuse investigation team, results in timely and planned action to protect children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Arrangements for file audit and quality assurance are well established and used effectively to promote improvements in practice.</li> <li>▪ Management information is comprehensive and effectively used at all levels of the local authority, the Children’s Trust and Local Safeguarding Children Boards to monitor performance and drive forward service redesign and improvement.</li> <li>▪ Good training and development opportunities are actively promoted for social workers and are well regarded.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficulties in recruiting permanent and suitably experienced front line managers and social workers result in additional work pressures and responsibilities for existing members of staff and a potential risk to the</li> </ul>

quality of the delivery of the service.

- Some social workers in the initial response team have caseloads which are significantly higher than the target set by the local authority, reducing their capacity to close cases in a timely way.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Gillian Norton, Chief Executive, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.  
Tony Eccleston, Independent Chair of Richmond upon Thames Safeguarding Children Board.  
Cllr Malcolm Eady, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families.