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Ms Pat Reynolds
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Redbridge
3rd Floor Front, Lynton House
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Ilford
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Dear Ms Reynolds

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Redbridge children's services

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within children's services in the London Borough of Redbridge which was conducted on 16 and 17 June 2009. 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, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection identified areas for priority action and a significant number of 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 services were satisfactorily carrying out their responsibilities in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- All cases subject to child protection inquiries are promptly allocated to a qualified social worker.
- From cases sampled, there is evidence that the service is sensitive to the individual needs of children and families.



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- The service works closely with partner agencies, which results in prompt notification of concerns.
- A thorough audit has been completed by the council on all case files involving children subject to a child protection plan, which has formed the basis of a borough-wide action plan, co-ordinated through the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- In addition, an evaluation of the work of the Child Protection Assessment Team, based on a review of practice, has recently been completed by the council. An improvement plan is being implemented but it is too early to be able to assess the impact or outcome.
- Most staff noted recent improvements to their work environment and the general management and organisation of the service, as well as improvements in morale.
- There are effective operational arrangements between the Child Protection Assessment Team and the council's Out of Hours Service, with good exchange of information to enable prompt assessment and service provision.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is good support provided to newly qualified social workers by colleagues and managers. This enables them to gain experience and to develop safely.
Areas for development
<p>Duty processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Processes to redress inconsistency in the screening of incoming contacts and referrals are not sufficiently embedded. ▪ Child protection referrals are handled promptly, but there is delay in the recording of some other contacts and referrals, such as for guidance and support. ▪ Clarity between partner agencies and the Child Protection Assessment Team about thresholds for assessment and services is inconsistent and thresholds are not co-ordinated with the common assessment framework referral criteria. This has led to inappropriately high levels of referrals to the Child Protection Assessment Team, resulting in unnecessary stress for some families and inefficient use of resources. ▪ The content and quality of initial and core assessments is inconsistent. This constitutes a risk of differential service to families.

- Casework assessment, planning and managerial oversight of cases does not always happen in a timely manner. As a result some children and families wait longer than necessary for decisions and provision of some services.
- Staff have high workloads which constitutes a risk to the safety and quality of safeguarding work.
- Supervision by managers is inconsistent, not fully recorded and does not follow the council's supervision procedures.
- Management decisions are not consistently recorded on files.
- The quality of casework recording on case files and the quality of reports to conferences is inconsistent.
- Quality assurance of casework is not fully embedded or consistent.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Areas for priority action

- The need to develop robust child protection systems in the Child Protection Assessment Team is recognised by the council and is evident in the restructuring of the service. However, there are weaknesses in relation to the strength of the Child Protection Assessment Team and its capacity for improvement, given the wide range of practice areas requiring development (see above), the restructuring of the service and the challenges with recruitment and retention of managers and social workers. Management of the Child Protection Assessment Team is not sufficiently focussed to implement and sustain the necessary improvements in child protection and assessment arrangements, including implementation of consistent thresholds for assessment and intervention within the interagency network.
- There are delays in completing some initial and core assessments and a high proportion of the sample of case files seen by inspectors did not record completion of initial and core assessments within the anticipated timescales.

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

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Roger Hampson, Chief Executive, London Borough of Redbridge
Cathie Pattison, Chair of Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board
Gary Monro, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Redbridge
John Browning, Department for Children, Schools and Families