

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020-7421-6666
Direct F 020-7421-6746
sue.leaver@ofsted.gov.uk



24 July 2009

Ms Gillian Pearson
Director of Children and Young People Services
London Borough of Bromley
Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley BR1 3UH

Dear Ms Pearson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Bromley 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 Bromley which was conducted on 24 and 25 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 no areas for priority action but 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 referral, assessment and contact services were satisfactorily carrying out their responsibilities in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Safeguarding arrangements are well-established.
- Extensive and effective action has been taken to address the recommendations from a serious case review undertaken in 2008 that identified significant individual and systemic weaknesses in the Referral



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and Assessment Team West. This has resulted in much improved arrangements to safeguard children.

- All referrals are reviewed by managers and timely action is taken to ensure children’s safety and well-being.
- Management decision-making is sound, with clear evidence of management oversight of cases that ensures plans are in place which deliver improved outcomes for children.
- All the assessments seen by inspectors were at least satisfactory and some were good.
- Police referrals concerning children at risk as a result of domestic abuse are detailed and child-focused, which ensures these children are safeguarded well.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children are seen promptly and their views are sought appropriately. ▪ The local strategic partnership and the local authority have prioritised safeguarding arrangements and have made additional resources available in response to the Laming Review. ▪ Good management action has addressed difficulties in recruitment and ensured that a high proportion of social work posts are filled by permanent staff. ▪ Good quality assurance arrangements support regular review of decision-making for children.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been a high turnover of Deputy Group Managers and some posts are filled by locum staff. As a consequence, supervision arrangements for some front-line staff are not well established and staff development needs are not well recorded or monitored. ▪ Detailed performance management information is not readily available to managers. ▪ Partner agencies are not routinely informed about the progress of individual referrals. ▪ The police response to child protection concerns is not always timely. Children are not left at risk but the joint response is not always effectively co-ordinated.

- Although children and families are seen promptly, the inspection found some delay in recording initial assessments.
- The method of calculating timely completion of initial assessments is not reliable and does not accord with national requirements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a horizontal line underneath.

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Doug Patterson, Chief Executive, London Borough of Bromley
Gillian Pearson, Chair of Bromley Safeguarding Children Board
Ernest Noad, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Bromley
John Browning, Department for Children, Schools and Families