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Ms Grainne Siggins
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Dear Ms Siggins

Focused visit to London Borough of Newham children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to the London Borough of Newham children's services on 6 and 7 February 2018. The inspectors were Mandy Nightingale, HMI, and Tara Geere, HMI. The quality assurance manager was Sean Tarpey, Senior HMI.

Inspectors considered the local authority's arrangements for child in need and child protection in accordance with the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). Specifically, they considered contacts, referrals and assessments for children in need of support and protection.

Overview

Corporate and political support is ensuring that there is a continued focus on improving social work practice for children in Newham. Leaders know their service well and this supports the development of good social work practice. In the cases considered, inspectors did not find children at risk of harm for whom the local authority had not provided an appropriate service. The development of neighbourhood working and smaller teams is supporting multi-agency engagement and the more effective management oversight of casework. However, this could be further improved by reducing the caseloads of some teams and a more consistent application of practice models.

Significant work over the last 12 months has resulted in an improved response to contacts and referrals. Partnership working in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) results in effective decision-making to safeguard children. However, there are delays in decision-making which could be improved through timelier responses from partners when information is requested. Thresholds are applied appropriately in the triage and MASH. This leads to assessments that ensure proportionate interventions to meet children's needs. Responses to child protection concerns are mostly timely. However, management oversight when key decisions are made needs

to be further improved to ensure consistency. Social workers who spoke to inspectors report that they feel supported and valued.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- Timeliness of partners' responses in the MASH needs to improve in order for social care to progress prompt decision-making and avoid unnecessary delay for all children.
- Management oversight is not consistent or sufficiently robust. Managers do not always evaluate all the information available to social workers or the rationale for their decision-making. Therefore, they miss opportunities to ensure that decisions for children are clear and made when concerns first arise.
- The 0–25 team does not respond effectively enough to referrals relating to children with a disability. Child protection concerns are responded to promptly and effectively. However, children in need of support experience significant delays in being seen and receiving an assessment. Too many assessments focus too much on adult needs rather than the child. This means that some children's needs are not assessed and there is a delay in receiving support.
- The local authority has not yet developed sufficiently robust performance management and monitoring tools. It does not have an accurate and systematic understanding of the effectiveness of social work interventions. This restricts the ability to drive the local authority's improvement plans.

Findings

- The recent restructure to smaller teams with increased managerial capacity is facilitating the implementation of the local authority's chosen social work model. This ensures that managers are able to focus more on providing support to social workers and to utilise performance management information to promote consistent practice within the borough.
- Managers and leaders are aware that caseloads for some social workers in the assessment teams remain too high, although the teams are provided with support and necessary resources to reduce the impact. Inspectors did not find any detrimental impact on the quality of practice for children within these teams. However, it does impact on the timeliness of progression of children's cases to closure or transfer to another team. This adds to workload pressures.
- Partner agencies clearly understand thresholds in the triage team, resulting in the timely transition of appropriate contacts to referrals. This ensures that most children receive the right service at the right time. Social workers appropriately

apply thresholds when making decisions for children, which means that children receive a proportionate service to meet their needs.

- The majority of information sharing from partners is prompt and of good quality. This is supported through co-location and improved partnership working. Consent is appropriately sought or overridden where appropriate.
- Management of allegations of abuse or poor practice against staff who work with children is effective and characterised by robust and timely decision-making.
- The emergency duty team effectively responds to contacts. The team is managed by suitably qualified and experienced workers, who are well supported by senior managers. The consistency of recording needs to improve to sufficiently evidence actions taken or show what further work is required to be carried out by the day service.
- Child protection concerns are swiftly identified and progressed to strategy meetings where planned interventions effectively safeguard children. Increasingly, strategy meetings include relevant partner agencies, are timely and lead to clear actions to safeguard children. However, a small number of strategy discussions do not include key agencies other than the police. This is a missed opportunity to improve information sharing and decision-making for children.
- Robust arrangements are in place to identify and respond to missing children and those at risk of child sexual exploitation. Agencies effectively share information and coordinate safeguarding and disruption activity. Return home interviews are not yet consistently undertaken for all children, thus limiting the breadth of information shared with agencies to underpin individual and strategic responses to protect vulnerable children.
- The majority of assessments recognise risk, with most providing a clear analysis and appropriate recommendations. Assessments are generally timely and include children's wishes and feelings, although they do not always reflect their lived experiences.
- Direct work with children and their parents is well embedded. Inspectors saw some specific and positive outcomes for children. However, children and parents' views are not consistently reflected in analysis and decision-making.
- Diversity is clearly understood by all staff, with evidence that it is considered in order to meet individual children's needs.
- Social workers value and are supported by a comprehensive learning and development programme. Recruitment and retention are supported by leaders with a wide range of 'grow your own' programmes and an international recruitment campaign.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Mandy Nightingale

Her Majesty's Inspector