

24 February 2010

Mrs Isobel Cattermole  
Acting Director of Children, Schools and Families  
The London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
Mulberry Court  
5 Clove Crescent  
London  
E14 2BG

Dear Mrs Cattermole

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets 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 Tower Hamlets Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 January 2010. 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:

- Referrals are allocated promptly and children are seen within prescribed timescales resulting in their immediate needs being met.
- The out-of-hours service takes appropriate action to safeguard children and communicates effectively with daytime services.



- All children and young people requiring a service are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers, ensuring an appropriate level of skills and expertise are afforded to each case.
- Where child protection concerns are identified, these are dealt with promptly and effectively to ensure children are safeguarded.
- Child protection plans are comprehensive and are used effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- The views of children and parents are sought and are taken into account when assessing and planning cases.
- Effective supervision and management decisions are made and recorded on both case files and staff supervision files.
- Improved working relationships with the police result in better information-sharing and effective collaborative work.
- Effective communication between the hospital social work team and medical professionals ensures that safeguarding concerns regarding babies and sick children are promptly addressed.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Senior managers effectively manage the strategic direction and performance of the department, undertake continuous and accurate self-assessments and, where necessary, have robust plans in place for improvement.</li> <li>▪ Good supervision, training and support have contributed to a stable and experienced workforce.</li> <li>▪ The Integrated Pathways and Support Team provide timely and effective screening and advice with a specialist team of workers from social care, health and education. This specialist knowledge is used well to promote and support referrals to other agencies.</li> <li>▪ Robust management oversight of casework and quality assurance processes contributes to high quality assessments and is used well to promote improved practice.</li> <li>▪ Effective oversight of multi-agency safeguarding practice is provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Lessons learnt from serious case reviews are disseminated well. This results in improved multi-agency practice, for example, enhancing the skills of practitioners to work with mobile or</li> </ul>

uncooperative families.

- Staff training, consultation and specific work with community groups ensures that the safeguarding needs of children from black and minority ethnic communities are met well.
- Surveys of service users are used well to inform developments, for example, in improvements to referral systems.
- The council, including elected members, supports the service well through the provision of extra resources to meet increased demand.

#### **Areas for development**

- Planning for children who are in need of support services is not sufficiently embedded with the potential for drift and delays in the provision of services.
- Although the timeliness of assessments is well monitored and improving, it is still below national averages and statistical neighbours.
- The common assessment framework is under-utilised as a multi-agency assessment tool and the role of the lead professional is not sufficiently understood by partner agencies.
- Lack of clarity and duplication in referral processes to some targeted or specialist services result in inconsistent levels of service to some children and young people.
- In most cases, work is completed in a timely manner. However there are delays in the formal closure of cases which result in unrealistically high caseloads.

Yours sincerely

**Karen McKeown**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Kevan Collins, Chief Executive and Chair of Tower Hamlets  
Safeguarding Children Board  
Cllr Abdul Asad, Lead Member for Children's Services, Tower Hamlets  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families