

21 May 2010

Dr Ian Birnbaum
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Dear Dr Birnbaum

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Sutton 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 Sutton Council which was conducted on 9 and 10 March 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:

- Decisions about contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales, with clear and appropriate decision making by front line managers.



- Children and young people benefit from the application of clear and effective inter-agency thresholds and are referred for support in a timely manner.
- Overall, initial assessments are satisfactory and some are of good quality.
- There is a clear and effective process in place for senior managers to be involved in decision making on complex cases. This includes a well established multi-agency panel which oversees front line decision making on cases and assures child centred outcomes.
- Regular and well-established random audits of case files enable senior managers to oversee and improve the quality of the referral and assessment service.
- The out of hours social work team is well co-ordinated with daytime services providing continuity of provision for children and young people.

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

| Strengths |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well established inter-agency communication at the front line effectively supports the safeguarding of children and young people. ▪ The quality of child protection assessment, analysis and joint working is consistently thorough and timely. ▪ An excellent range of services is available for children with disabilities delivered by a multi-disciplinary team which provides referral and assessment services. All children and young people with disabilities receive appropriate and specific service provision. ▪ Children and family members are consistently and actively involved in assessments and the planning process. They always receive copies of their assessments, which ensures that they have a good understanding of the assessment and care plan. Consequently all assessments lead to realistic plans which are agreed by family members and partners. ▪ A range of good training and development opportunities, including learning from serious case reviews, is promoted and valued by social work staff. |
| Areas for development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistent managerial oversight of children in need cases leads to delay in the completion of some assessments within timescale. |

- Although all core assessments seen lead to realistic and effective plans, the clarity and quality of analysis within core assessment documents are variable.
- The quality of supervision is inconsistent and does not always provide the opportunity for reflective practice.
- Audits of front line supervision are not routinely undertaken.

Yours sincerely

Colette Elliott-Cooper
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Paul Martin, Chief Executive, London Borough of Sutton
Tony Eccleston, Chair of Sutton Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Tony Brett Young, Lead Member of Children's Services, Sutton
Andrew Spencer, Department of Children, School and Families