

22 December 2010

Mr N Whitfield
Director of Education, Children's and Cultural Services
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
1st Floor
Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3BZ

Dear Mr Whitfield

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

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 November 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any 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.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 have been addressed.

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

| Strengths |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Single Point of Access (SPA) provides a well managed contact and referral |



service supported by an excellent performance management system which is customer focused and improves the customer experience. The service includes a senior practitioner with designated responsibility for attendance at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and a common assessment framework (CAF) co-ordinator. Staff receive extensive training and regular performance assessment to ensure exacting standards are met.

- Effective safeguarding is supported by responsive and accessible prevention and early intervention services provided through the five multi-agency locality teams known as Quindrats. Where there are concerns which do not meet the threshold for statutory services, referrals are directed to the relevant Quindrat for local community support services. The council has a strong focus on effective and seamless transitions from local support service provision to higher level statutory intervention services and vice versa using a step up and step down process.
- The CAF is well embedded across the service and the partnership with evidence of a wide range of partners and agencies completing CAFs. Children and families receive good, timely multi-agency support through well co-ordinated CAF provision. The use of the CAF has been further strengthened through the family support and adolescent response teams which take the role of lead professional to ensure responsive and effective community based intervention and support.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- The application of thresholds is well managed by the SPA. The quality of referral information provided by the police in particular is comprehensive enabling appropriate decisions to be made.
- Children and families are effectively safeguarded through timely and appropriate responses from the initial response team. Child protection processes are progressed in line with statutory guidance.
- Most initial and core assessments seen by inspectors are comprehensive and completed within the required timescales. Assessments include multi-agency information and explicit consideration of risk and protective factors. Good reference to research informs the assessment analysis and increases service users' understanding of the issues. Children and their parents' views are clearly recorded. Children are recorded as being seen including when seen alone. Recommendations are relevant with an outcome focus.
- Most case records seen by inspectors are up-to-date and accurately reflect the work being undertaken.
- Children and their families benefit from timely case transfer arrangements which provide continuity of service provision between the initial response and

child protection teams.

- All cases are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers. The council's recruitment and retention strategy has resulted in an increase in permanent staff including the appointment of a team manager within the initial response team. This was previously an area for development.
- Caseloads are maintained at an appropriate level and staff report that their caseloads are manageable. This was previously an area for development.
- Families for whom English is not their first language have appropriate access to translation services provided through a combination of commissioned services and a pool of staff with a range of languages.
- Safeguarding practice on a single and joint agency basis is improved through regular audit activity, performance management and thematic audits. Service deficiencies are identified with appropriate actions set out to improve practice. Audit activity and performance is overseen on a quarterly basis by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Where required, action plans to improve performance are put in place with progress subject to regular monitoring.
- The emergency duty team (EDT) serves four London boroughs. Effective two way communication between the council and the EDT promotes out-of-hours safeguarding arrangements. The EDT provides a responsive and effective service supported by good working relationships with the police.
- Professional development is promoted by a wide range of training including mental health, domestic abuse, post-qualifying award and achieving best evidence. Staff report training opportunities to be a key factor in their decision to work for the council. Newly qualified social workers receive mentoring support in addition to formal supervision and a protected caseload.

Areas for development

- Management oversight through formal supervision is regular and routinely recorded on case files. Action plans are clear but do not consistently record the required timescales for delivery. Where informal supervision takes place, management decisions are not routinely entered onto case records. Recording on supervision files seen by inspectors did not evidence reflective practice and challenge.
- Case work monitoring processes are not robust. Some cases seen by inspectors are allocated to staff who have left the council. Work on the cases has been completed but not closed on the system.
- Assessments and child protection conference reports within the disabled children's service are of variable quality. Whilst inspectors were satisfied that appropriate safeguarding work was being undertaken, the recording of Section

47 child protection investigations is not always clear.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Sands
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Gillian Norton, Chief Executive, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council
Tony Eccleston, Chair of Richmond upon Thames Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Christine Percival, Strategic Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Children's Services, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education