

24 November 2010

Ms Pat Reynolds
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Redbridge
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Dear Ms Reynolds

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Redbridge 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 Redbridge which was conducted on 26 and 27 October 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 areas for development.

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

Strengths

- Since the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children in January 2010 highly effective remedial action has been taken to review and restructure the child protection and assessment service. Capacity in front line services has been strengthened, including the appointment of specialist senior practitioners in each of the duty and screening teams. This has resulted in significantly improved safeguarding arrangements through stronger management oversight



of case work, effective supervision of staff and more timely decision making at the point of contact.

- The recent establishment of a case transfer panel has strengthened the effectiveness of systems to transfer case work from the child protection and assessment teams into the children in need and looked after children's team. The panel provides rigorous managerial oversight of the volume and complexity of ongoing case work. This oversight ensures that cases are transferred in a planned and timely way which enables best use of resources in the child protection and assessment service to safeguard children and young people.

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

- Assessments are comprehensive and of a good quality with clear analysis leading to effective planning for children and families. They demonstrate cultural sensitivity, with children and families being seen, their views being recorded and risk and protective factors being explicitly addressed to safeguard children.
- The leadership and management of the duty and assessment team ensure that practice and procedures effectively manage risk. Prompt and appropriate responses safeguard children and young people at risk or in need.
- Social workers report that senior managers are accessible and supportive.
- The electronic recording system is used effectively by managers to monitor the quality and timeliness of assessments and the actions taken by social workers to protect and safeguard vulnerable children and families.
- Social workers' caseloads are at a manageable level enabling timely assessment and effective services to vulnerable children.
- Case records are generally up-to-date and demonstrate clear management of risk through sound decision making and effective planning.
- Section 47 child protection enquires are undertaken by qualified social workers.
- Newly qualified social workers have protected caseloads and receive good levels of support and training opportunities.
- All staff value access to good training opportunities.
- The supervision of social work staff is regular with evidence of effective managerial oversight of cases. Management decisions and case specific supervision records are routinely entered on to the electronic case files. Case direction within supervision clearly sets out actions to follow up although does

not always specify timescales for the appropriate completion of these tasks.

- The emergency duty team is well established. It is staffed by qualified and experienced practitioners and provides an effective out-of-hours service with good linkage to the child protection and assessment service and partner agencies.
- The multi-agency membership of the children with disabilities service ensures a well co-ordinated approach and timely response to the safeguarding of children in need of specialist services.

Areas for development

- While common assessment framework (CAF) training has been delivered to a large number of professionals from relevant agencies the CAF is not well established and numbers of completed assessments remain low.
- The inconsistency in applying thresholds by partner agencies contributes to a high number of inappropriate referrals to the child protection and assessment teams.
- While agency checks in pursuance of Section 47 child protection enquires are made, these are not routinely recorded on case files.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Norry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Roger Hampson, Chief Executive, London Borough of Redbridge
Cathie Pattison, Chair of Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board
Alan Weinberg, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Redbridge
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