

21 May 2010

Mr K Bromley-Derry
Executive Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Newham
1000 Dockside Road
London
E16 2QU

Dear Mr Bromley-Derry

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Newham 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 Newham 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 the help and 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:

- Initial and core assessments include the appropriate contribution of other agencies and professionals and are appropriately signed off by managers who specify actions to be followed.
- Duty and assessment team managers are visible, supportive and provide effective guidance on case management. They also routinely evaluate



the quality of work and use the electronic recording system to monitor contact and referral trends over time and subsequent action.

- Initial and review conferences are well managed ensuring appropriate decisions in respect of child protection planning. Conference minutes include contingency arrangements in the event of agreed plans not being achieved.
- Investigations in accordance with Section 47 Children Act 1989 (CA1989) are timely and are appropriately triggered where initial assessments reveal the need for more in-depth investigations.
- Out of hours emergency duty arrangements are well established and staffed by experienced practitioners. Referral pathways are clear and protocols for transferring work are effective. Responses to children in need who attend accident and emergency units are appropriate.
- All cases are suitably allocated and social workers receive good quality supervision and support from their managers.
- Social workers report that they have access to a range of training in safeguarding and child protection.
- Children are being seen alone and their wishes and feelings are being suitably recorded and acted upon.
- Services are delivered sensitively in respect of the cultural and religious needs of children and families while maintaining a clear focus on safeguarding.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An effective strategy is in place to strengthen the organisation of duty and assessment services leading to demonstrable improvements in the level and consistency of service provision. ▪ Senior managers use performance information effectively to monitor trends and progress against agreed service aims and objectives. Managers are responsive to the high levels of contacts and referrals and are skilled in deploying staff to meet fluctuating demands. ▪ The authority is clearly aware of service challenges and acts promptly to tackle performance issues and to ensure that there is capacity to respond to the high demand for services.

- Leadership and management of the duty and assessment service are purposeful and focused well on safeguarding and child protection.
- The co-location of the common assessment framework coordinators and Health visitor within the duty and assessment system is increasing joint working opportunities and reflects commitment to good service integration.

Areas for development

- Improve the timeliness of both initial and core assessments in order to meet the performance targets set by the council within the Local Area Agreement.
- Incorporate a specific section in electronic records to ensure that there is a robust analysis of needs and risks with clear and measurable service decisions and outcomes.
- Refine processes to enable information to be automatically transferred across electronic records in order to reduce the current time consuming requirement for social work staff to 'cut and paste' information.
- Establish more robust arrangements to monitor all police referrals to ensure that cases are not closed without a fully-evidenced and recorded management decision.

There are no areas for priority action identified through this visit.

Yours sincerely

Martin Ayres
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Joe Duckworth, Chief Executive, Newham
Kamini Rambellas, Independent Chair of Newham Safeguarding Children Board
Quintin Peppiatt, Lead Member for Children's Services, Newham
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families