

8 December 2010

Mr Duncan Clark
Strategic Director of Learning and Children's Services
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Guildhall 2
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Dear Mr Clark

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Royal Borough of Kingston 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 Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council which was conducted on 9 and 10 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 one area for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in February 2010 have been met. The council provided increased resources to tackle delay effectively in the completion of initial assessments. Operational support by managers has significantly strengthened. Changes agreed to the out-of-hours emergency duty team arrangements shared with four neighbouring London boroughs have improved the ease of access for service users. Although the computer systems for recording the different levels of service



provision have not changed, systems have been strengthened sufficiently to ensure that key information is not missed.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of the common assessment framework remains strong, supported by a high quality information sharing service (known as ASKK - Advancing Services for Kingston Kids) linked to the contact and assessment service. These very effective arrangements ensure that the needs of children and young people are properly screened to determine the appropriate level of safeguarding service. ▪ Working relationships with partner agencies remain highly effective. The quality of responsive joint working has a high impact on the effectiveness of initial interventions to safeguard children and young people. ▪ Staff value and benefit from high quality, regular supervision and management oversight. The effectiveness of supervision is evident in the quality of decisions recorded on case files. ▪ A well developed and robust culture of performance management and organisational learning is in evidence across the service. Managers carry out regular audits, and findings contribute to continuing practice development. Particularly strong organisational learning has resulted from the analysis of serious case reviews, with positive impact on the safeguarding of children and young people.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessments are clear and analytical, risk and protective factors are identified and effective plans implemented. ▪ Assessments demonstrate that the views of children are considered and their wishes and feelings are routinely taken into account. Staff are skilled in enabling children with disabilities to ensure their voices are heard in child protection investigations. ▪ Child protection procedures are kept up-to-date and comply with statutory requirements. They are understood and applied by staff consistently, with effective management oversight to ensure the safety of children and young people. ▪ Decision-making is prompt, and most assessments are completed in accordance with timescales set out in statutory guidance, which ensures that children and young people receive a timely and appropriate service.

- Effective arrangements, such as good access to interpreters, are in place to meet the diverse needs of children with respect to race, culture, religion and disability. The relevance of equality and diversity is suitably addressed in assessment and case planning. Strategic planning is focused appropriately on reducing inequalities in outcomes through targeted service provision.
- Record-keeping is up-to-date and demonstrates effective management of the risk of harm, sound decision-making and effective planning.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements demonstrate effective responses and appropriate referral to the contact and assessment service.
- Staff report that workloads are manageable.
- Staff are suitably qualified and enhance their safeguarding knowledge and skills through high quality training and developmental opportunities.

Area for development

- A chronology of significant events and agency and professional contact with the child and family is not always present in case files. This is due to a weak functionality in the information technology system. Managers are aware of this and plans are in hand to ensure that improvement is achieved.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Hunt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Bruce McDonald, Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Ann Dominey, Chair of Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Patricia Bamford, Lead Member for Children's Services, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education