

2 September 2010

Mr Andrew Ireland  
Director of Children's Services  
London Borough of Havering  
Town Hall  
Main Road  
Romford  
Havering  
RM1 3BB

Dear Mr Ireland

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Havering Council children's services**

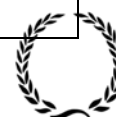
This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in the London Borough of Havering Council which was conducted on 3 and 4 August 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Staff morale is high and accompanied by a strong commitment at all levels to continually improve the duty and assessment service.</li><li>▪ Thresholds are effectively monitored by the referral panel which ensures consistency of decision-making on referrals that are closed by the duty and</li></ul>



assessment service.

- There are effective and safe systems to process all incoming work with evidence of good managerial oversight.

### **Satisfactory practice**

- Children and young people are consistently seen during the course of assessments and their wishes and feelings are taken into account.
- The quality of assessments and planning is generally satisfactory. Some are completed to a high standard. Families are appropriately involved and their ethnicity, cultural and disability needs are considered.
- Child protection cases are promptly identified and allocated to qualified social workers.
- Joint working arrangements with the police child abuse investigation team results in timely plans to protect children and young people.
- Social workers are well supported by their managers in case work decision making. A good range of training opportunities are provided for social workers.
- Completed assessments and cases requiring transfer to other teams are audited and signed off by managers enabling a smooth transition of cases between teams.
- An appropriate range of performance management information is collected to support operational management of the duty and assessment service.
- The interface between the out-of-hours social work and daytime services is clear and integrated and assists the continuity of case management.

### **Areas for development**

- Some children in need cases that meet the threshold for service are not appropriately allocated to social workers in a timely manner following referral.
- Social care thresholds are not always well understood by partner agencies resulting in an increased referral rate and under-use of the common assessment framework in meeting the needs of vulnerable families.
- The quality of referrals from other agencies is inconsistent. Some insufficiently define need or risk for the child and place further demands on the duty and assessment service.
- Cases are not always closed in a timely way which limits the capacity of social workers to take on new cases. The limitations of the integrated children's

system are a contributory factor.

- While supervision is taking place on a regular basis this does not always provide sufficient challenge to the practice of social workers or evaluate the impact of training on their performance.
- The current systematic audit of case files by managers is not well established and leads to variation in the quality of practice by social workers.
- The integrated children's system does not provide sufficient management information and, because of difficulties in its operation, reduces the capacity of social workers to manage their caseloads effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

**Derek Churchman**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Cheryl Coppel, Chief Executive, London Borough of Havering  
Sue Dunstall, Independent Chair of Havering Safeguarding Children Board  
Paul Rochford, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Havering  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education