

15 December 2010

Mrs Catherine Doran
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Harrow
PO Box 7
Station Road
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Dear Mrs Doran

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within London Borough of Harrow 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 Harrow Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 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.

Two of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 have been addressed. The third has not been addressed and remains an area for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Management oversight of assessment practice is thorough. Very detailed case notes from managers give clear direction to social workers undertaking



assessments in a way that minimises risk and improves outcomes for children.

- There is an effective and well established process in place for investigating complaints, including a long standing contractual arrangement with a local voluntary agency to deliver statutory processes. This ensures that learning from complaints is thorough and contributes to effective planning of the referral and assessment service.

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

- The referral and assessment service follows Pan-London Safeguarding Children Board procedures with additional local protocols and procedures in place where necessary, for example for unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- The ethnic origin of service users is fully and accurately recorded and there is a good arrangement in place for translation services. This is good practice and is to be further developed.
- There are effective arrangements in place for quality assurance of the referral and assessment service which have been independently audited, and this assists in the service's continuous improvement.
- All core assessments and most initial assessments are completed on time and analysis in most cases is good or very good, although a few are insufficient. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Out-of-hours arrangements are satisfactory with clear communication pathways from the emergency duty team to daytime services.
- The service follows a comprehensive multi-agency thresholds policy which defines when a referral to children's social care is appropriate.
- There is a robust system in place for the prioritisation of cases where risk of harm is clearly identified at the contact stage, and, for escalating those cases where the risk emerges once allocated within the children in need teams.
- Clear arrangements are in place for Section 47 child protection enquiries. Timely strategy meetings lead to comprehensive action plans and prompt initial child protection conferences.
- The staff group delivering the referral and assessment service is professionally qualified and suitably experienced.
- Children are generally seen and where appropriate, their wishes and feelings are gathered as part of the assessment process.
- Caseloads are of a manageable size and there is a timely transfer of cases to

the children in need teams. The impact of high caseloads was an area for development at the last inspection.

Areas for development

- There is inappropriate delay in progressing some contacts to referrals while information gathering is being undertaken by unqualified social care assistants. This practice does not meet statutory guidance and isn't mentioned in local procedures, and it potentially results in delays to assessing risk and providing services.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) remains underdeveloped and the CAF is not integrated. Basic information is therefore not available to other statutory assessment processes. Senior managers have plans in place to remodel provision through the creation of a multi-agency integrated service in order to address this issue. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Although all staff members are supervised, the time period between formal supervision meetings often exceeds that specified in the supervision policy.
- There is no formal management system in place for monitoring the training input that staff members receive and ensuring that their identified learning needs are being addressed.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Michael Lockwood, Chief Executive, London Borough of Harrow Council
Caroline Healey, Independent Chair of Harrow Safeguarding Children Board
Mitzi Green, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Harrow
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