

4 January 2010

Mr Paul Clark
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Harrow
PO Box 7
Station Road
Harrow
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Dear Mr Clark

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Harrow 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 Harrow which was conducted on 2 and 3 December 2009. 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 your help and the 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:

- Decisions about contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales, with robust decision making by managers.
- Inter-agency thresholds are clear and are effectively applied with timely referrals of individual children from partner agencies, ensuring vulnerable children are promptly identified and supported.



- Initial assessments are satisfactory overall and some are of good quality. Their timeliness is above the national average.
- Arrangements for identifying and responding to children with complex disability needs are clear and effective, with evidence of good quality initial and core assessments.
- Children and young people are involved appropriately in assessments and their views are taken into account when making plans for their future.
- Senior managers have good oversight of front line decision making and take decisions as required about complex family situations.
- Regular and well established random audits of case files enable senior managers to oversee and improve the quality of the duty and assessment service.
- The out of hours service is good and well co-ordinated with daytime services.

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

Strengths

- Child protection enquiries are thorough and timely and are always carried out by a qualified social worker. Appropriate and effective action ensures that safeguarding risks for children are managed well.
- Social workers have good access to regular supervision and value the professional advice and support provided by line managers.
- Good training and development opportunities are promoted and well regarded by social workers. This has included learning from serious case reviews.
- Awareness of equality and diversity is strongly integrated in policy and in casework practice and planning. For example, faith groups and the Somali community are effectively involved in parenting assessments and in work with families to improve safeguarding outcomes for children and young people.
- Well established partnership working between statutory agencies and particularly good use of voluntary sector provision contribute very effectively to safeguarding and support for children. This ensures that families receive the necessary intervention from a wide range of services, for example from the Women's Centre with victims of domestic violence.

Areas for development

- While core assessments clearly focus on the holistic needs of children, include a high level of detailed information and lead to appropriate plans, the quality of analysis is variable and is insufficiently underpinned by research and evidence based practice.
- High caseloads held by some social workers adversely affect their capacity to close and transfer cases in a timely way.
- The Common Assessment Framework is not routinely used by all partner agencies to improve outcomes for children in need.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Michael Lockwood, Chief Executive, London Borough of Harrow
Paul Clark, Chair of Harrow Safeguarding Children Board
Christine Bednell, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Harrow
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