

13 October 2010

Mr Andrew Christie
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Town Hall
King Street
London
W6 9JU

Dear Mr Christie

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Hammersmith and Fulham 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 Hammersmith and Fulham Council which was conducted on 14 and 15 September 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.

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

Strengths

- Staff report that they benefit from high levels of professional support from managers and colleagues including an appropriate range of developmental opportunities. Staff morale is high.
- Good use of resources which respond flexibly to changes in demand. The effective deployment of staff demonstrates good forward planning.



- Success in the recruitment and retention of staff through creative and effective strategic planning.

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

- Child protection procedures comply with statutory requirements. They are understood and applied by staff consistently with effective management oversight.
- Workloads are manageable and cases are allocated promptly to enable timely safeguarding of children and young people.
- Attention to the relevance of diversity issues is well established in practice and procedures.
- Assessments are thorough and lead to evidence based judgements with effective planning. Risk and protective factors that impact on a child's safety are assessed consistently.
- The views of children and their families are consistently taken into account in the assessment and planning of their cases.
- Section 47 enquiries are comprehensive and timely and lead to appropriate safeguarding actions.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements demonstrate effective responses and timely referral to the contact and assessment service.

Areas for development

- In some cases examined the reason for undertaking a core assessment is not always clear.
- The process to ensure Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for staff are consistently up-to-date is insufficiently clear and robust.
- Arrangements for routine case file audit and quality assurance by managers are not yet fully established.
- Systems for obtaining the views of service users to influence service delivery remain underdeveloped.
- The common assessment framework used in the family support teams, is not linked effectively with the contact, referral and assessment service.

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: Geoff Alltimes, Chief Executive, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Russell Waite, Chair of Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Board
Helen Binmore, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education