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Ms Gillian Palmer
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Greenwich
Riverside House West
Woolwich High Street
London
SE18 6DF

Dear Ms Palmer

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Greenwich 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 Greenwich which was conducted on 21 and 22 July 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, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

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: 45 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:



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- National performance indicators show an improving service, in particular the timeliness of core assessments, the decrease in the percentage of repeat referrals and the decrease in the number of referrals to children's social care.
- Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales. Children's needs are effectively prioritised at an early stage.
- Children's ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious needs are identified at an early stage and are taken into account in assessments.
- Children and family members are regularly involved in the assessment and planning to meet children's needs.
- The service is sufficiently resourced to meet the identified needs of children and their families.
- The out-of-hours service has suitable staff who communicate well with the day time duty system

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The area is working well to ensure multi-agency working is appropriately focused and effective in supporting children and their families. ▪ Child protection enquiries are thorough and timely and are carried out by well trained competent social workers. ▪ The common assessment framework is used effectively to ensure children and families receive early intervention when appropriate. ▪ Files are regularly audited by senior managers. ▪ Children and family members have effectively influenced the development of service delivery and as a result improved contact and waiting facilities have been introduced.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Record keeping is inconsistent: all file records are not up-to-date, each child in the same family does not have a separate record and a chronology is not available on files of all children in need cases. ▪ The supervision arrangements for social work staff is not of a consistently high standard.

- Initial assessments are not used consistently to determine whether a referred child is a child in need, as advised in '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*'. Management information reports on the timescales for initial assessments used within the service are not always consistent with national guidance.

Yours sincerely

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mary Ney, Chief Executive, London Borough of Greenwich
Gillian Palmer, Chair of Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board
Jackie Smith, Lead Member for children's services, London Borough of Greenwich
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families