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Mr David Archibald  
Executive Director of Children and Adults  
London Borough of Ealing  
Perceval House  
14-16 Uxbridge Road  
Ealing  
London  
W5 2HL

Dear Mr Archibald

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Ealing 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 Ealing 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 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.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 have been considered during this inspection. Progress has been made in some areas while some areas for development continue to be addressed although plans for their completion are in place.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High quality performance management information and case file auditing enables robust monitoring by senior managers and drives improvement of service delivery. Peer case file auditing enables greater consistency in practice and is viewed positively by front line managers. The service has a good approach to scrutiny and commissions external auditing of practice.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In cases examined children are provided with appropriate services in a timely manner which ensures they are adequately safeguarded.</li> <li>▪ Clear policies and procedures are in place which meet statutory guidance and are consistently applied.</li> <li>▪ All staff receive regular supervision both formally and informally. A new electronic system to record supervision has recently been introduced and there was evidence of effective use of this by some managers. This approach appropriately considers the personal and professional development of staff and provides challenge to their performance and quality of work.</li> <li>▪ Caseloads are manageable and equitable across the two contact, referral and assessment teams and this has led to improved consistency in casework practice and performance. This was an area of improvement from the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Children's views, wishes and feelings and those of their parents are obtained and inform assessments.</li> <li>▪ Referral and re-referral rates are reducing. This is due in part to the improved quality of assessment and decision making and the effectiveness of early intervention services provided by Supportive Action for Families in Ealing (SAFE).</li> <li>▪ Workforce development activity has reduced vacancies and the use of agency staff. This is an area of improvement since the last inspection. There is good morale and staff state they are well supported and are provided with a range of training opportunities that meet their needs. This includes well developed and supportive arrangements for newly qualified social workers.</li> <li>▪ Staff are suitably qualified to undertake their role and the size and complexity of caseloads is managed appropriately commensurate with staff experience.</li> <li>▪ Equality and diversity issues are adequately considered in the majority of cases. The service has access to a wide range of community resources to meet</li> </ul>

the needs of a diverse community and there is timely access to interpreting services.

- Recording of practice accurately reflects the quality of work undertaken and is up-to-date.
- Arrangements for the provision of emergency duty services are clear and work well. Appropriate action is taken out-of-hours to safeguard children and timely information is provided electronically to daytime staff on work undertaken.

### **Areas for development**

- The majority of assessments seen are timely, gather appropriate information from partners, identify risk and protective factors and include some analysis. However, assessments do not always clearly demonstrate the rationale for management decisions. Plans flowing from assessments are not sufficiently explicit about how the plan will safeguard the child, manage risk or specify the outcomes to be achieved.
- Some effort has been made to gather the views of service users regarding the development of the referral and assessment teams since the last inspection. This activity has been recent and an action plan is being developed. There is no evidence yet, therefore, of any changes that this survey work has made to improving service delivery.
- While there is a system in place to promptly acknowledge referrals, outcomes are not consistently shared with professionals, children and parents. This was an area for development at the previous inspection and there is not yet evidence of improvement.
- As identified at the last inspection, there continues to be some inappropriate referrals to the referral and assessment service which could be appropriately dealt with by SAFE teams or other early intervention approaches. This means that not all children are receiving appropriate services to meet their needs in a timely manner. A recent common assessment framework review has been undertaken that identifies a number of barriers to full implementation, and an action plan is now in place.
- Multi-agency strategy meetings within the children with disability service are not being used to decide if Section 47 child protection enquiries should be initiated or to plan Section 47 child protection investigations. Instead they are used as a multi-agency decision making forum to establish if thresholds have been met to proceed directly to initial child protection conferences. As a result some Section 47 child protection enquiries and investigations are not undertaken in a clear or timely manner that is consistent with statutory guidance.

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

Yours sincerely

**Pauline Turner**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Martin Smith, Chief Executive, London Borough of Ealing Council  
David Worlock, Chair of Ealing Safeguarding Children Board  
Cllr Patricia Walker, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Ealing  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education