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Mr D Archibald  
Executive Director of Children and Adults  
London Borough of Ealing  
Percival House, 14-16 Uxbridge Road  
Ealing, London  
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Dear Mr Archibald

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Ealing's 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 Ealing which was conducted on 1 and 2 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, 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: 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:

- Clear procedures and practices are in place to ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard children and young people are met.
- Systems for receiving referrals through a centralised contact centre are well structured. Administrative processes within the referral and assessment teams



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are operated by competent staff and effectively support work within the service.

- The screening of referrals and decisions on action to be taken is undertaken well by experienced Deputy Team Managers.
- Multi-agency thresholds on integrated working and access to children's services are clear, agreed by partner agencies, and in most cases are appropriately implemented within the referral and assessment service.
- Early intervention services are effective in providing a range of preventative interventions. Appropriate liaison arrangements with the referral and assessment teams ensure prompt intervention to meet the needs of children and their families.
- All cases held within referral and assessment services are allocated to suitably experienced and qualified staff. Child protection referrals are responded to promptly and are assessed by suitably experienced qualified social workers.
- Equality and diversity issues are satisfactorily addressed in casework assessment and planning, with ready access to interpreters where required.
- Arrangements for the transfer of cases to long term teams are clear and appropriately implemented in most cases.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff are committed, motivated and enthusiastic. They state that they are well supported by managers who are readily accessible for formal and informal consultation.</li> <li>▪ Staff are provided with good quality induction and training opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and competence.</li> <li>▪ Links between the contact, referral and assessment service and other local services are well established and result in prompt communication and exchange of information.</li> <li>▪ Performance and audit information, such as from regular case file audits, is routinely collated and interrogated by managers at all levels to identify trends and issues that impact on the effectiveness of services, such as ensuring case recording is up to date and of satisfactory quality.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case supervision is regularly undertaken both formally and informally. However, the recording of case discussions and personal development</li> </ul>

undertaken in supervision is variable in quality and frequency across the teams.

- Caseload levels and the distribution of work are inconsistent across the two referral and assessment teams which reduces the consistency of performance and quality of service delivery. For example, the quality of assessments is variable; some are of good quality, but others are too descriptive and lack sufficient analysis which results in the needs of some children not being adequately identified or met.
- Young people and service users were involved in their assessment and case planning in most cases seen by inspectors. However, the extent of user involvement is variable across the teams. Plans to involve service users in developing referral and assessment services have yet to be fully implemented or to demonstrate impact.
- Performance against national indicators relating to the proportion of re-referrals is too high. Some re-referrals occur because of the inadequate quality of analysis in previous assessments where needs had not been promptly identified. Managers are aware of this and are taking appropriate corrective action, however it is too early to see the impact.
- The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) remains at an early stage of development and has yet to be fully utilised by partner agencies. This results in some referrals being made to the referral and assessment services where universal or targeted services could have intervened.
- The outcome of referrals and assessments is not consistently reported to young people and their families or to partner agencies.
- Staff turnover and the high use of locum staff within one of the referral and assessment teams have had a recent but marked adverse impact on its performance, particularly on the quality and continuity of assessments. Senior managers have taken prompt action to improve recruitment and retention and management of the service, however it is too early to see the impact of this.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Martin Smith, Chief Executive, London Borough of Ealing  
David Worlock, Chair of Ealing Safeguarding Children Board  
Ian Gibb, Portfolio holder for Children's Services, London Borough of Ealing  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families