

6 April 2011

Mr Paul Greenhalgh  
Executive Director Children, Young People and Learners  
London Borough of Croydon Council  
Taberner House  
Park Lane  
Croydon  
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Dear Mr Greenhalgh

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Croydon Council 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 Croydon Council which was conducted on 8 and 9 March 2011. 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.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 have mostly been met. The systematic auditing of case files now supports improvement and performance management in the work of the intake team. Improvements to the functioning and in the use of ICS, the electronic recording system, have contributed to case records being up-to-date and the ending of the paper records system.



Progress has been made by deploying additional staff to screen referrals from the police, although senior managers are aware that further improvement is needed. The remaining areas for development are supervision and the use of the common assessment framework.

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 has been addressed. The council has made good progress in restructuring and redesigning their service to deliver an effective and responsive contact, referral and assessment service which offers a robust response to children at risk of immediate and significant harm.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The improvement brought about by the restructure of the intake service is significant and demonstrates the council's ability to deliver rapid change. The overall impact is a more robust and effective service for children and young people at risk of harm. The development and implementation of monthly senior management case file auditing has led to sustained improvements in key areas of performance and practice. This is evident by the allocation of all cases and staff reporting a substantial improvement in the support they receive to manage their caseloads effectively.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children and young people at risk of harm are promptly identified and appropriate interventions are implemented by social workers.</li> <li>▪ Effective use of child protection procedures and improved standards of practice help safeguard children from risk of significant harm.</li> <li>▪ All child protection enquiries are carried out by suitably qualified and experienced staff. Outcomes for children and decision making are clearly evidenced in case records. When formal child protection investigations are undertaken they are well managed in partnership with the police.</li> <li>▪ Referrals are responded to promptly and practice complies with statutory requirements which are implemented efficiently and effectively.</li> <li>▪ Management decision making is of a consistently good quality and is clearly evidenced on case files. Managers routinely record their rationale for the focus of assessment activity in initial assessments.</li> <li>▪ The quality of assessments range from adequate to good and there is evidence of risk and protective factors being explicitly analysed. Assessments are generally completed in a timely manner and performance in this area is improving. Assessments lead to the effective provision of services which have a</li> </ul>

positive impact on the lives of children and their families and reduce levels of risk.

- Children are routinely seen alone in child protection enquiries and in the process of completing core assessments and their views and feelings are clearly evident in case records.
- The out-of-hours team is effective, takes appropriate action to minimise risk of harm to children and young people and in cases seen links appropriately with daytime services.
- The quality of case recording is satisfactory and up-to-date.
- Social workers are very satisfied with the restructure of the intake service and feel supported by senior managers. Staff report a significant improvement in the support they receive to manage their caseloads effectively.
- Training is of good quality and is easily accessible. Newly qualified social workers and returners to social work are particularly impressed by the standards of training and support they receive.

#### **Areas for development**

- Equality and diversity issues are not fully or consistently addressed in assessments. Senior managers have plans in place to deliver training to address this.
- All staff are suitably qualified and experienced but there is heavy reliance on interim staff in key roles such as team managers and senior practitioners who undertake screening tasks.
- Although social workers report improvements in the quality of their supervision this is not sufficiently regular for all staff. The quality of supervision files is variable and does not always meet the authority's own standards. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Partnership working is not sufficiently embedded and partner agencies do not routinely, fully contribute to assessments. This may result in children's needs not being comprehensively assessed or the benefits of multi-agency plans not being available to them.
- The common assessment framework remains underdeveloped and there is little evidence of its use. However, the council are aware of this and have begun to develop early intervention strategies to more effectively support team around the child working with children in the community. This was an area of development in the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

**Lynn Radley**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Jon Rouse, Chief Executive, London Borough of Croydon Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education