

4 January 2010

Mr Dave Hill  
Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learners  
London Borough of Croydon  
Taberner House  
Park Lane  
Croydon  
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Dear Mr Hill

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Croydon Borough Council 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 Croydon Borough Council 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.

The inspection identified one area for priority action and a number of 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:

- Effective action is taken to ensure that children at risk of immediate harm are safeguarded.
- Children are seen on their own and their views taken into account appropriately during assessments.



- Good working arrangements between the duty team and the police child abuse investigation team help to ensure that concerns about children at most risk are investigated promptly and appropriately.
- Inspectors found that all child protection or child in need cases were allocated at the time of inspection.
- Good systems have recently been put in place for managers to agree and sign off casework decisions with some positive impact on the quality and timeliness of service delivery.
- Cases discussed with staff demonstrated mostly effective work to assess the needs of children and families although some lower priority cases experience delays.
- Case recordings are generally satisfactory with some good examples; appropriate case decisions are made.
- The diverse needs of individual children and families were sensitively addressed in the cases seen by inspectors.
- Transfer arrangements have been recently reinforced to ensure that the duty team is more able to hand cases over to the appropriate teams.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council knows itself well and has recently taken effective action in advance of the wider service reorganisation to reinforce initial referral and assessment arrangements and to ensure that they deliver timely and appropriate services. This includes increasing the size of the team and providing rigorous and visible front line management with good day-to-day guidance and support for the duty team.</li> <li>▪ Front line staff and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that a good child-centred service is delivered during the forthcoming major refocusing and restructuring of children's services across the council.</li> <li>▪ Good organisational and communication arrangements are in place between the duty team and the emergency duty team which lead to more consistent service delivery.</li> <li>▪ Effective joint work between the UK Borders and Immigration Service and the attached social work team ensures children coming to their attention are appropriately assessed and the necessary action is taken to safeguard and</li> </ul>

support them.

### Areas for development

- With the exception of child protection referrals which are effectively prioritised and fast-tracked, the system for managing contacts and referrals from the first involvement of the contact centre through to the duty team is cumbersome and adds unnecessary layers of work. It results in administrative duplication and delay to the assessment process for children in need.
- Two electronic recording systems are in place as well as the continuing need for some paper records. Staff have differential access to the two systems which makes inputting information difficult in some cases, case recording unwieldy and slow, and contributes to the delays in maintaining up-to-date records.
- The police currently send very large numbers of notifications of police involvement with families to the duty team without indicating the level of risk or urgency. This adds a significant workload for the Duty Manager who screens them.
- The Common Assessment Framework is under-developed and only partially implemented by some agencies; its variable use does not support wider inter-agency working and commonly agreed thresholds.
- There is a significant lack of resources within council services to support children and families in need. Following the completion of assessments, they are currently referred to non-statutory agencies for support services where they can experience further delays.
- Performance management and monitoring systems, such as systematic auditing of case files, are not sufficiently developed or robust enough to support effectively the work of the duty team.
- The quality of analysis and its recording in cases is too variable and case recordings are not always up-to-date.
- Although formal staff supervision is in place, the council's targets relating to the frequency of supervision are not always met and the rigour of challenge to practice is variable.

This visit has identified the following area for priority action.

Area(s) for priority action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council has identified the need for a major reform of children's services which they have acknowledged currently does not provide a sufficiently effective, efficient and responsive service to improve children's life chances. Action has been taken to ensure that services to safeguard children at risk of immediate and significant risk of harm are robust and the council has very advanced plans in place for the wider refocusing and reform of services although these have yet to be implemented.</li> </ul>

The area for priority action identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Jon Rouse, Chief Executive, Croydon Borough Council  
Hannah Miller, Chair of Croydon Safeguarding Children Board  
Councillor Tim Pollard, Lead Member for Children's Services, Croydon Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families