

10 December 2009

Mr John Christie
Director of Children and Families
London Borough of Brent
Chesterfield House
9 Park Lane
Wembley
Middlesex HA9 7RW

Dear Mr Christie

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Brent 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 Brent council which was conducted on 11 and 12 November 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:

- Children and young people are appropriately involved in assessments and their views are taken into account when making plans for their future.
- Decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales and are appropriate.



- Policies and procedures for safeguarding of children and young people are up-to-date and are easily accessible to staff. A good range of management information is available to support managers in monitoring day to day performance.
- All child protection (Section 47) investigations are undertaken by appropriately skilled, experienced and qualified social work staff.
- Record keeping on case files is up-to-date and demonstrates effective management of the risk of harm, of decision making and effective planning for children in need.
- Senior managers are appropriately informed and involved in decision making on complex family situations, and have good oversight of front line case work planning and practice.
- Regular and well-established random audits of case files enable senior managers to oversee and improve the quality of the referral and assessment service.
- The Common Assessment Framework is well established; assessments undertaken engage children, young people and parents well and result in clear plans and provision of support.
- Effective partnership working ensures that families receive appropriate support when needed through a good range of services.
- Out of hours duty services are good and well co-ordinated with daytime services.
- All social workers and social work assistants have satisfactory access to training. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has delivered training and briefings which have been effective in helping social workers to understand the learning from serious case reviews.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well established partnership working between statutory agencies and particularly good use of voluntary section provision contributes effectively to the safeguarding of children. For example, the Asian Women's Centre provides good support for women experiencing domestic violence. ▪ Consideration of equality and diversity is strongly reflected in casework practice and planning. Effective specialist support services are provided to meet the diverse needs of children and family members from abroad who have

no recourse to public funds.

- Newly qualified social workers have good access to training, personal mentors and protected caseloads.

Areas for development

- The quality of assessments is satisfactory overall and some are good, but the depth of analysis is too variable, which results in a reduced quality of service for some children and families.
- While all social workers and social work assistants have satisfactory access to supervision, opportunities for reflective analysis of case work practice are insufficient.
- Care plans are in place for all children and young people, but the plans are not always specific, measurable and supported with clear targets.
- Families are informed, orally of the outcomes of assessments but do not routinely receive written or signed assessments.
- Some aspects of the electronic recording system are inefficient and result in additional work for social work staff. These include a lack of automatic generation of chronologies and of clear recording of the initial assessment outcome when proceeding to child protection investigation or core assessment. In addition, the system inappropriately records additional information on open cases as a repeat referral.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Gareth Daniel, Chief Executive, London Borough of Brent
Donald McPhail, Chair of London Borough of Brent Safeguarding Children Board
Robert Wharton, Lead Member for Children's Services, Brent Council
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