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Mr Robert McCulloch-Graham
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Barnet
North London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South
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Dear Mr McCulloch-Graham

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Barnet 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 Barnet which was conducted on 2 and 3 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 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.

Action has been taken to address the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 with some improvements achieved. However, progress has been limited in respect of demonstrable improvement in the consistent recording of analysis as part of the core assessment.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a strong leadership culture in place, and all levels of management are readily accessible and provide effective support to front line workers in a way that both minimises risk and promotes good outcomes for children. For example, senior managers have ensured children and their carers benefit from multi-agency early intervention support services by placing well-managed common assessment framework (CAF) advisers within the referral and assessment teams. ▪ There are good arrangements in place to ensure prompt and effective response to domestic violence referrals. This includes a domestic violence specialist based in each of the referral and assessment teams and an additional CAF adviser, who is a qualified social worker, is to be based in the police public protection team to screen referrals. ▪ There is a stable, suitably qualified and experienced staff group with a good blend of experience and skill. Staff morale is good; they value the management support they receive and the training opportunities that are available to them. For example there is a well-established partnership with a local university to train suitable members of the council's own workforce to become qualified social workers, thereby avoiding difficulties in recruitment. ▪ Innovative methods are used to seek children's views on child protection processes, such as the well established Junior Local Safeguarding Children Board, and engagement in national research funded by the Children's Commissioner.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The staff group reflects the ethnic mix of the population they serve and the service can call on additional expertise including a translation service that covers a very wide range of languages. ▪ Robust policy and procedures are in place for safeguarding children. They are well understood and consistently complied with by staff. ▪ Caseloads are generally manageable and there is timely allocation of work, which ensures that assessments are prioritised according to identified risk. The needs of children at risk of significant harm are promptly responded to by a qualified social worker, so that strategy meetings take place, and section 47 enquiries commence, on the day of initial contact. ▪ An agreed multi-agency thresholds document for intervention is in place which

effectively underpins the provision of integrated service delivery.

- There is evidence of learning from serious case reviews, for example improvements in liaison arrangements with the probation service.
- Effective and robust out-of-hours arrangements are in place which link well to daytime services
- The wishes and feelings of parents and children are routinely incorporated into the assessment process.
- Managers use a comprehensive range of performance management tools and regular audits to help inform the quality of services and future service development needs.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board has established clear processes for partners to measure, scrutinise and monitor safeguarding practice via a locally agreed suite of performance data.

Areas for development

- While steps have been taken to address the variable quality of assessments, progress has been limited in respect of demonstrable improvement. The recording and completion of assessments is not timely. Some are too descriptive, and chronologies are not routinely used to inform assessment and case planning. The quality of analysis in some assessments was an area for development at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements.
- While the poor recording of decision making in supervision has been resolved since the last inspection, recording is not now sufficiently focused on social workers' own development needs and skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Nick Walkley, Chief Executive, London Borough of Barnet
Tim Beach, Chair of Barnet Safeguarding Children Board
Andrew Harper, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Barnet
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education