

17 December 2009

Mr Robert McCulloch-Graham
Director of Children's Services
The London Borough of Barnet
North London Business Park (NLBP)
Oakleigh Road South
London N11 1NP

Dear Mr McCulloch-Graham

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within London Borough of Barnet 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 Barnet which was conducted on 18 and 19 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 involved appropriately 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.



- Consideration of equality and diversity is effective and well reflected in casework practice and planning. For example, children and young people have good access to interpreters covering a wide range of languages that are used in local communities.
- Social workers' caseloads are well managed and services are delivered effectively, despite a 50% increase in referrals of children in need during the past two years.
- Management of contacts and referrals to the disabled children's team is good and consistent with arrangements in the referral and assessment service.
- Social workers have good access to regular supervision and training and value the professional advice and support provided by line managers.
- The Barnet Safeguarding Children Board has delivered training and briefings which have effectively informed social workers of the learning from serious case reviews.
- Out of hours services are good and well co-ordinated with daytime services.

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

| Strengths |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An experienced and stable management team provides effective leadership to staff and ensures that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are identified and responded to appropriately. All cases seen by inspectors had been responded to effectively and in a timely manner. ▪ Child protection enquiries are thorough and timely and are always carried out by a qualified social worker. Appropriate action ensures that safeguarding concerns about children who have been referred to the service are minimised. ▪ Inter-agency thresholds are clear and are effectively applied with timely referrals of individual children from partner agencies and consistency in responsiveness. ▪ Well-established partnership working between statutory agencies and particularly good use of voluntary section provision contribute very effectively to safeguarding and support for children. This ensures that families receive the necessary intervention from a wide range of services. For example, the Afghan Women's Centre provides good support to women experiencing domestic violence. |

- Senior managers support staff who are working with complex cases through a well-established care planning forum. This enables effective senior management involvement, challenge in decision making and good oversight of casework practice.
- Senior managers have a good understanding of the quality of services. A wide range of audits are systematically undertaken and used effectively to inform service development and maintain good practice.

Areas for development

- While core assessments clearly focus on the holistic needs of children, include a high level of detailed information, and lead to appropriate plans, the quality of analysis is variable and is insufficiently underpinned with research and evidence-based practice.
- Where there are several children in a family, core assessments of children in need are not always sufficiently focused on each child as an individual.
- Records of supervision are not consistently clear about what needs to be achieved and by when. Records of case discussions are handwritten and then scanned, which means that they are not always legible. The council recognises this and is introducing electronic supervision forms to ensure better recording of reflective practice and social workers' professional development needs.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Nick Walkley, Chief Executive, London Borough of Barnet
Tim Beach, Chair of Barnet Safeguarding Children Board
Fiona Bulmer, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Barnet
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