

13 January 2011

Ms Helen Jenner
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Town Hall
1 Town Square
Barking
1G11 7LU

Dear Ms Jenner

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 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 Barking and Dagenham Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 December 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.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 have been considered during the inspection. The local authority developed an action plan and significant progress has been made in these areas. Some areas of development continue to be addressed but a clear plan is in place.

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 has been addressed.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The continuum of needs and services model for all agencies and considerable expansion in the use of the very well established common assessment framework ensure that partner agencies make appropriate referrals to children's social care or to agencies that provide early intervention services. These effective arrangements provide widespread, consistent and prompt early intervention support services to children and families.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out-of-hours arrangements for receiving and responding to referrals are effective and demonstrate clear analysis of need and appropriate links to daytime services and partner agencies. ▪ Good performance management has resulted in improvements in the timeliness of initial assessments. ▪ Where children are at risk of significant harm prompt and appropriate action is taken to ensure that they are safeguarded. This includes appropriate multi-agency involvement and clear arrangements between the assessment teams and children with disabilities team. ▪ Safeguarding investigations are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers. ▪ Records of initial child protection case conferences seen by inspectors demonstrate that children and families are involved in decision making and that the meetings contribute to effective child protection planning. ▪ Newly qualified social workers receive good support and training opportunities and have protected caseloads. Staff value the support they receive from accessible and experienced managers. ▪ Children and families are appropriately involved in contributing to their assessments and attending planning meetings. ▪ Staff workloads are manageable and this enables initial assessments to be delivered in a timely manner. ▪ The council has progressed the implementation of the new integrated children's system which has resulted in more accurate case records and improved management information.

Areas for development

- Case records do not consistently and comprehensively reflect social work practice and decision making. Managers therefore do not always have an immediate audit trail of case decisions to confirm effective oversight of contacts and referrals and that the full range of children's needs have been met.
- The quality of initial assessments is variable with too many lacking detailed analysis of children's needs. They are too narrative and case recordings do not sufficiently demonstrate how risk and protective factors have been considered; this was an area of development at the previous 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

Bill Wallace
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: David Woods, Acting Chief Executive, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Simon Hart, Chair of London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Rocky Gill, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education