

30 June 2011

Ms Libby Blake
Executive Director of Family and Children's Services
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council
Kensington Town Hall
Hornton Street
London
W8 7NX

Dear Ms Blake

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council 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 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council which was conducted on 1 and 2 June 2011. 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.

One of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 17 and 18 August 2010 has been addressed. However, while progress has been made in addressing the other area for development, the impact of inter-racial and cultural factors in assessments, this has not yet been fully addressed. This therefore remains an area for development.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social workers have access to a wide range of good training opportunities. Knowledgeable, confident and accessible managers support staff well. Social workers demonstrate a good understanding of their cases. ▪ Teams are well resourced and caseloads are maintained at manageable levels enabling high quality and timely recording. ▪ The electronic case management record provides a clear and easy to use system which is highly valued by staff. It supports social workers very well in managing their work and enables the progress of cases to be monitored consistently by managers. ▪ Team managers have access to detailed, good quality performance management information which supports them in managing their teams effectively. This enables team managers to identify areas for improvement at an early stage and take timely steps to address these.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Duty arrangements are effective and ensure a timely and appropriate response to concerns about children and young people. Child protection investigations are undertaken promptly and thoroughly and appropriate steps are taken to ensure children's safety. ▪ The quality of assessments is adequate overall and many are good. Assessments usually take good account of historical information and contain appropriate analysis and sound conclusions. ▪ In almost all assessments the views of children are captured well with creative work to engage with young children in some cases. In most cases there is evidence of children and young people's views informing subsequent work and decisions. Children and young people are seen alone where appropriate. ▪ Social workers engage well with parents, including fathers, ensuring that they are involved in assessments and plans regarding their children. Interpreters are used appropriately when required to enable full participation. ▪ In almost all cases there is evidence of regular managerial oversight providing clear overview and direction. Cases are discussed regularly in supervision. ▪ Team managers regularly audit cases. Audits of individual cases are comprehensive and balanced. Findings are discussed with social workers identifying areas of good practice and areas for improvement.

- Young people at risk of becoming homeless are effectively identified and their needs assessed and responded to appropriately. Good multi-agency working is helping some of these young people to achieve stability and engagement in further education.
- The emergency duty team provides an effective out of hours service which communicates promptly and clearly with daytime staff.
- Staff have annual performance reviews, these are detailed and reflective but development plans are not sufficiently specific and measureable.

Areas for development

- The circumstances in which parental consent is needed to see and speak with children and make checks with other agencies are not applied consistently. As a result not all initial assessments are as comprehensive as they should be and important opportunities to share relevant information with other agencies are sometimes missed.
- In some cases examined by inspectors the initial assessments were signed off as complete on the electronic case management system before the children were seen. This is not in accordance with government guidance outlined in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' March 2010.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is not well established and as a result a very low number of referrals to family and children's services are supported by a completed CAF.
- The impact of diverse inter-racial and cultural factors in assessments was identified as an area for development at the last inspection. Progress has been made in addressing this; staff have received recent training which they have found very helpful. In some cases examined by inspectors good account was taken of these factors, however this is not yet embedded in all assessments.
- The ethnicity of a significant number of children and young people is not recorded on the electronic record. As a result it is difficult to assess if services are accessed by the whole community.
- The quality of the recording of supervision examined by inspectors is variable and there is no consistent process for recording formal supervision.
- Themes and issues arising from case audits by team managers are not routinely collated and reported on. There have been no specific audits commissioned by the Local Safeguarding Children Board of contact, referral and assessment arrangements.

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

Yours sincerely

Pat O'Brien
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Derek Myers, Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education