

30 June 2011

Mr Andrew Ireland
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Havering Council
Town Hall
Main Road
Romford
Havering
RM1 3BB

Dear Mr Ireland

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Havering 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 London Borough of Havering 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 practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

There has been some progress in three areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in September 2010 and these now meet statutory requirements. However, there has been insufficient progress in four areas of development and these continue to fail to meet the requirements of statutory guidance.



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

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Effective and safe systems are in place to process all incoming work to the duty and assessment service with clear evidence of managerial oversight.
- Contacts are appropriately and promptly screened by senior practitioners.
- The response to domestic violence incidents is robust. When cases do not meet the criteria for social work involvement, there is an effective process for referring these cases to the local children's centres for support.
- Children and young people are seen as part of their assessments and their wishes and feelings are taken into account.
- Families are appropriately involved in assessments and their ethnicity, cultural and disability needs are considered well.
- The quality of assessments and planning is at least satisfactory, with some assessments completed to a high standard.
- Timescales for carrying out assessments are generally consistent with national guidance however cases are not always closed in a timely way. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Child protection cases are promptly identified and allocated to qualified and experienced social workers who undertake investigations in a timely manner.
- Joint working arrangements with the local metropolitan police child abuse investigation team results in timely plans to protect children and young people.
- Social workers are well supported by their managers in case work decision making.
- Training opportunities are provided for social workers and this is appropriate and valued by staff.
- Children in need cases that meet the threshold for service are appropriately allocated to social workers in a timely manner following referral. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- There are regular case transfer meetings which enables a smooth transition of cases between the duty and assessment and the longer term teams.
- Regular case file audits are conducted, by managers, and these ensure that the work and recording by social workers has been undertaken to a consistent standard. This was area of development at the last inspection.

- There are good links between the duty and assessment team and the children with disability team. For example, cases that might require a child protection response are co-worked to ensure these children are dealt with in ways that best meets their individual needs.

Areas for development

- The common assessment framework is insufficiently embedded in the practice of all agencies. This results in partner organisations not sufficiently working together to provide support earlier or prevent families experiencing further difficulties. As a result inappropriate referrals are being made to the duty and assessment team. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- The quality of referrals from other agencies is inconsistent. Some referrals are unclear about the issues involved and place demands on the duty and assessment team to carry out additional work to clarify the level of need and risk. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- Case recording systems are not effectively utilised. File information is retained electronically on two different systems and hand written records are also kept. This duplication increases the time spent in recording work undertaken and checking past involvement in cases. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- While supervision takes place on a regular basis, the recording of this is poor and does not evidence sufficient challenge to the practice of social workers. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- The out of hours service appropriately undertakes joint work with the police when children are identified as at risk of harm. However, the criteria for taking the decision as to whether these should be conducted under the Section 47 Children Act 1989 is different than that used by the daytime services leading to inconsistencies in the management oversight and recording practices between the services. No children were seen to be at risk from this practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Penswick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Cheryll Coppell, Chief Executive, London Borough of Havering Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education