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Ms Gillian Pearson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
London Borough of Bromley Council
Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley
BR1 3UH

Dear Ms Pearson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Bromley 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 Bromley Council which was conducted on 5 and 6 April 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 an area of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The relevant areas of development identified at the previous inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services in April 2010 have been addressed with the exception of the quality of service provided by the out-of-hours service, which remains an area for development.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong and highly effective leadership from senior managers and elected members has led to a number of well-targeted initiatives which have made substantial improvements to the referral and assessment service. In spite of budgetary pressures within the council, a significant increase in financial resources has been agreed which have been effectively used to address longstanding problems with the recruitment and retention of staff. The commissioning of effective management training has resulted in strong management oversight and effective decision-making processes.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The consolidation of two locality-based referral and assessment teams into one borough-wide service has improved the consistency in the application of thresholds for services. ▪ Contacts and referrals are dealt with in a timely manner with one point of referral to a designated duty team. Management decision-making about the progress of referrals is clear and prompt. Good systems are in place to inform agencies about the outcomes of their referrals. ▪ All cases are allocated to suitably qualified social workers. Appropriate arrangements are in place with the children with disabilities team to jointly manage cases where there are safeguarding concerns. The transfer of cases to long term teams is managed effectively. ▪ Newly qualified social workers are well supported to take up their role and develop appropriate skills through an established development programme. Enhanced levels of supervision and joint-working opportunities with more experienced colleagues are also readily available. ▪ The quality of core and initial assessments is adequate. Information is appropriately gathered from other professionals. Although in many cases the overall analysis of the case is limited, the major risks and protective factors are effectively outlined and plans made to address these. All assessments are appropriately countersigned by managers with clear directions about the progress of the case. ▪ Children are routinely seen, their views recorded and taken into account as part of the assessment process. ▪ After a long period of temporary management at both strategic and operational levels, an effective permanent management group is now in place. These managers are well respected by staff and provide regular and focused

supervision which has resulted in improved practice.

- Case recording is clear and the majority of records are up-to-date. Contacts with other agencies and families are appropriately recorded.
- A system of case file audits is undertaken at all levels of the service. Effective systems are in place to report the findings of the audits to senior managers and to disseminate the learning from these audits.
- Performance management systems are improving and managers undertake monitoring on a weekly basis. As a result, the importance of the timeliness of assessments is well understood by social workers. Performance in the completion of initial and core assessments has improved considerably from a low base, although they remain below statistical neighbours.
- Ethnicity and cultural needs of the children and young people are recorded well and used to inform assessments. Translation and interpretation services are easily accessible to staff when needed. The workforce reflects the community that it serves.
- Regular meetings with local maternity units and midwives ensure that information is shared appropriately and pre-birth assessments are undertaken in a timely manner.

Areas for development

- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) as a referral form to the referral and assessment services is not effective. It fails to provide sufficient succinct information about the reason for the referral and the outcome anticipated.
- The service provided by the out-of-hours service is not sufficiently robust. Limited time is made available for formal handovers to daytime staff. Recording systems used by the service do not clearly reflect any assessment of risk to children and young people nor always outline any outstanding issues that need to be addressed. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Social workers are offered a range of training to develop their social work skills. However, specialist training for experienced workers is limited, including a lack of training to undertake appropriate age assessments and in interviewing child witnesses and victims.
- Lack of clear pathways to the early intervention services within the council, including CAF, results in many children and young people being inappropriately referred to the referral and assessment team. The council is aware of this deficit and plans are in place to address this by the realignment of some services.

- Although child protection strategy discussions take place by telephone between the police and the referral and assessment team, strategy meetings are not routinely convened. This prevents a wider range of partners engaging and contributing to the process. However, these discussions are effectively recorded and decision-making is clear.
- Some long-standing operational difficulties between the referral and assessment team and the police are not effectively escalated to senior managers or through the Local Safeguarding Children Board to improve safeguarding practice and joint-working arrangements.
- Feedback from service users is not routinely collated to help to assess the impact of the work of the team or inform further developments.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Doug Patterson, Chief Executive, London Borough of Bromley Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education