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Mr Tolis Vouyioukas
Interim Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services
London Borough of Newham Council
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London
E16 2QU

Dear Mr Vouyioukas

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Newham 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 Newham Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 March 2011. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2010. 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for the help and time given during this inspection.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Most of the areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in March 2010 have been addressed but there remain an outstanding area for development; the timeliness of core assessments remains variable and the incorporation of a specific section on the electronic records



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to ensure there is a robust analysis of needs and risks with clear and measurable service decisions and outcomes remains outstanding.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Triage Team, established in October 2010, provides an intensive service to children and families and effective screening of Metropolitan Police referrals including domestic violence reports. The new arrangement enables children and families to receive much improved and timely services allowing for effective targeting of resources within universal and safeguarding services. ▪ Newham's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) audit arrangements are robust and effective in improving the quality of practice. The audit tool provides a thematic overview of practice within a multi-agency framework and is used by a range of key partners. This provides good learning resulting in single and joint agency recommendations which are monitored through the LSCB Performance Management sub-group. Evidence of improved practice was found, for instance regarding the timeliness of completion of initial assessments.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is evidence that practice is sensitive and respectful of the diverse needs of children and families, for example there is good use made by social workers of interpreters provided by the language telephone service. ▪ Child protection investigations in accordance with Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 are always carried out by suitable qualified and experienced social workers. ▪ Out-of-hours arrangements are well established and the team is made up of suitably experienced childcare practitioners. There is good information exchange and communication with the Safeguarding Assessment Team which ensures clear pathways in the management of risk. Practice seen by inspectors effectively manages risk of harm and contributes to improving outcomes for children and young people. ▪ Service users' views are actively sought and considered and used to improve practice. Newham's Annual Residents Survey effectively captures the views and experiences of young people and families in respect of their experiences of services received and is used to inform the children and young people's plan. ▪ Supervision of social work staff is regular and in accordance with council procedures. Inspectors saw evidence of some high quality work. Social

workers report team managers are accessible and supportive.

- Social work staff within the Safeguarding and Assessment and Disabled Children and Young People teams are suitably qualified and experienced. Social workers seen by inspectors demonstrated a high level of commitment and understanding of the diverse range of needs of children and families.
- Overall staff workloads are manageable, however in a small number of instances social workers' caseloads were high.
- The common assessment framework is well established across Newham. This has enabled effective early intervention for children with identified additional needs. The assessments seen by inspectors demonstrated a good multi-agency approach is undertaken in the provision of universal and targeted services.

Areas for development

- The inspectors found some cases where management oversight was not consistently robust or always compliant with safeguarding procedures. This consequently has the potential of exposing children to risk of significant harm.
- A significant number of unallocated children in need cases were identified which could potentially lead to delay and to needs and risks not being fully assessed. Inspectors were satisfied that excessive delay in the allocation of cases is avoided through daily review arrangements by the duty management team and weekly review undertaken by the Divisional Safeguarding Manager.
- There is no specific section on the electronic records to ensure that there is a robust analysis of needs and risks with clear and measurable service decisions and outcomes. This was an area for development identified within the last inspection.
- The timeliness of core assessments does not meet the performance targets set by the council within the Local Area Agreement. This was an area for development identified within the last inspection.
- Newham's inter-agency threshold document is out-of-date. Arrangements are in place to review this as part of the pending re-design of children's services.
- Representatives from secondary and primary schools and early years services report improved communication with the senior management team within children's services and an improvement in the timeliness of response to initial referrals. However, some concerns remain regarding the variable timescales taken for work to be completed.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Candlin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Kim Bromley-Derry, Chief Executive, London Borough of Newham Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education