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Mr Andrew Christie
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Town Hall
King St
Hammersmith
W6 9JU

Dear Mr Christie

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Hammersmith and Fulham children's services

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Hammersmith and Fulham council which was conducted on 4 and 5 August. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of 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 your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Arrangements for screening contacts and referrals are satisfactory and management action is timely in most cases.



- Thresholds for access to the contact and referral service are appropriate and consistently applied.
- Most cases are allocated promptly and children are seen within prescribed timescales.
- Most case files are well documented with a good level of detail.
- Average case load size is manageable, although some cases are remaining open longer than necessary while awaiting the completion of recording and management sign off.
- The voice of the child is well reflected within assessments.
- A thorough external audit of referral and assessment systems and case work practice has occurred.
- Management supervision and decision making is satisfactory in most cases and is well evidenced in the electronic case record.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

| Strengths |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morale is high and staff report that they feel well supported by managers and colleagues. ▪ In response to an increase in referrals, additional resources have been provided. ▪ Robust management arrangements are in place to address issues of competency and poor practice. ▪ Good support and encouragement is given to unqualified staff to undertake study leading to a social work qualification. |
| Areas for development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of casework is variable and in some cases lacks thorough analysis. ▪ The slow response to requests for information from some partner agencies delays the completion of some assessments. |

- Arrangements for obtaining the views of service users to contribute to review and development of policy and services are not well developed.
- Some initial and core assessments are being prematurely recorded as complete, for the purposes of management information collection, before case work recording has been completed.
- Arrangements for routine case file audit and quality assurance by managers are insufficiently developed.
- Supervision records for some practitioners are insufficiently detailed and of variable regularity.
- Although attendees at child protection conferences are promptly provided with decision and action minutes, there is delay in the electronic recording of the minutes of child protection conferences and child protection plans.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Geoff Alltimes, Chief Executive, Hammersmith and Fulham
Andrew Christie, Chair of Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Board
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families