

17 February 2010

Mr Duncan Clark
Strategic Director of Learning and Children's Services
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Guildhall 2
St James Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT1 1SN

Dear Mr Clark

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames 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 the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames which was conducted on 19 and 20 January 2010. 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.

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:

- Contacts about the welfare of children, young people and their families made by professionals and the public are clearly recorded and promptly actioned.

- Managerial decisions about contacts and referrals are timely and in most cases are clearly and promptly recorded on case files.
- All cases involving children and young people which require an assessment are promptly allocated. The quality of assessments and analysis in both children in need and child protection cases is satisfactory, and some is of a good standard.
- In all cases seen by inspectors which required a child protection response, risks were identified early and dealt with promptly, ensuring that children are appropriately safeguarded.
- All children and young people who have a child protection plan are allocated to qualified and experienced social workers, ensuring an appropriate level of expertise. In most cases there are timely and effective initial intervention plans that are shared with parents and carers.
- In cases reviewed by inspectors, children are seen during assessments, and seen alone when necessary by social workers. The individual needs of siblings in a family are given due consideration in assessments.
- Most case records contain appropriate information about the ethnic origin, religion, and cultural issues regarding children and families. Interpreter services are readily accessible to support work with a diverse local population consisting of numerous ethnic minority groups.
- The emergency duty team makes appropriate contact with safeguarding services to ensure that out of hours work is followed up effectively.
- Co-location and shared management of the safeguarding and care planning teams enable effective transfer of cases following assessment.
- Performance monitoring and case auditing are routinely undertaken and the outcome is reported to senior management, with a growing emphasis on improving the quality of intervention with children and families.
- Staff in the referral and assessment service are well supported by their managers who are readily available for formal and informal consultation and advice.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The common assessment framework (CAF) is used with clear impact across the council. The process of carrying out a CAF is supported well, with evidence that partner agencies work to shared thresholds for intervention. This helps to

maintain a low rate of re-referral to statutory safeguarding services.

- There are good working relationships with partner agencies in safeguarding, including key professionals such as the police, health services and schools. This results in effective and responsive joint working to support vulnerable children and families.
- Senior management has addressed the doubling in the last two years of the number of initial assessments and the number of children subject to a protection plan, by providing direct and visible support, additional social work posts, and a good workforce development plan.

Areas for development

- Increasing demand and other pressures on the referral and safeguarding service have led to backlogs in the completion of initial assessments.
- Workload pressures have led managers to be more directly involved in some aspects of operational support than they would normally expect to be. These duties affect capacity to review work more effectively. For example, ensuring that all assessments focus on and include relevant history and chronology but avoid unnecessary narrative, and ensuring that there is no variation in the quality and recording of supervision between teams.
- Different recording systems apply to children and families who receive a statutory safeguarding service and for those who receive a 'lower level' of support service. In some cases the information did not correspond in both systems, with the risk that key information is missed.
- The out of hours contact telephone number for the emergency duty team is shared between four neighbouring London boroughs. The response is complex and insufficiently clear to ensure that a caller in Kingston would identify with the automated answer and persist with trying to talk to a social worker.

Yours sincerely

Steve Briggs
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Bruce MacDonald, Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
 Celia McGruer, Chair of Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Safeguarding Children Board
 Councillor Patricia Bamford, Lead Member for Children's Services, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
 Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families