

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 03000 130570

Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Joy Hollister
Director of Community and Children's Services
City of London Council
Guildhall
EC2P 2EJ

Dear Ms Hollister

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within City of London 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 City of London Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 July 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. The inspector 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. The inspector 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.

Two of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in April 2010 have been addressed. Further work is required to improve the quality of social work supervision to ensure this contributes towards ongoing professional development and appropriately directs case planning.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Senior managers are highly visible and well informed about the needs of children within the area, based on thorough audit and service evaluation. They exercise good oversight of individual cases and a good level of professional support and challenge to the social workers involved.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective procedures and practices are in place to ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard children and young people are met. ▪ Contacts and referrals are responded to promptly and there is effective decision making regarding required actions. ▪ Social workers have manageable caseloads and complete assessments in a timely fashion. Effective partnerships with police, health and education professionals ensure that emerging child protection concerns are investigated promptly and effectively. ▪ The quality of initial and core assessments is adequate overall, and some seen are of good quality. Assessments satisfactorily identify needs, strengths and risks with sufficient analysis to enable suitable services to be identified. ▪ Most case records and assessments include appropriate information and analysis of ethnic origin, religious and cultural issues relating to children and their families. Interpreter services are available and used effectively. ▪ Children are seen by social workers during assessments, and where necessary are seen alone. Their views, and those of other family members, are taken into account. ▪ Case recording is generally up to date and there is sufficient evidence of management decision making on case files. This was an area for development at the last inspection. ▪ The emergency duty team provides an effective service. Communication with daytime staff is prompt, enabling concerns to be assessed and appropriate services to be provided to children and families. ▪ Staff have access to a range of good training opportunities and social workers maintain an up to date knowledge of safeguarding developments and practice. This was an area for development at the last inspection. ▪ Performance monitoring and case file auditing are routinely undertaken. Findings are discussed with social workers and identify both areas of good

practice and areas for improvement. Information is aggregated and used to inform team development plans.

Areas for development

- While social workers report that they are well supported the quality of individual supervision recording is variable. Individual case work is discussed, however records of supervision do not clearly identify required actions and relevant timescales, and sufficient attention is not given to ongoing professional development. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- While child protection investigations are timely, there have been significant delays in sending out conference minutes. The council is aware of this issue and has commissioned a new independent provider to chair child protection conferences.
- The children's social care service has relied heavily on agency staff over the last 12 months. Handover arrangements to incoming social workers have not always been effectively managed and outgoing social workers have not always ensured that an updated chronology is on case files; this undermines the quality of ongoing case planning.
- A re-launch of the common assessment framework (CAF) in 2010 has been partially successful. More professionals have received training and a more detailed analysis of local need undertaken. However, the number of CAF assessments completed remains below council projections indicating that either a number of children have additional unmet needs or that the council projection needs further review. An experienced practitioner has recently been appointed to develop this area of the service.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Chris Duffield, Chief Executive, City of London Corporation
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education