

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

London Borough of Bromley

Inspection dates: 9-18 July 2012
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Age group: All
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Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

The inspection judgements and what they mean

1. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in the London Borough of Bromley is judged to be adequate.

Areas for improvement

2. In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in the London Borough of Bromley, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- children's social care should review all open child in need cases that have not yet been escalated into safeguarding processes, including those held in Teenager and Parent Support Service (TAPSS), to satisfy themselves that suitably robust plans are in place
- ensure effective consideration is given to a child or young person's ethnicity, culture, religion, language and disability in assessments so as to inform planning

Within three months:

- ensure child in need and child protection plans are robust, comprehensive, specific, have clear timescales, allow for the evaluation of progress and are shared effectively with parents
- take action to ensure that risk is explicitly addressed in assessments, plans, reports, meetings and discussions with parents in child protection cases and cases where potential risks are beginning to emerge

- ensure that interventions with families actively consider the experience of the child
- ensure that work undertaken in TAPSS is driven by a plan with specific and measurable objectives.

Within six months:

- develop a performance management framework that effectively ensures that managers have a consistent focus on driving improvement in the quality of practice
- ensure that the voice of the children, young people and parents effectively influences service improvement
- ensure that suitable arrangements, including the use of advocates, are developed to enable young people to routinely attend and contribute to case conferences.

About this inspection

3. This inspection was unannounced.
4. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. Inspectors scrutinised 74 case files, observed practice and discussed the help and protection given to these children and young people with social workers, managers and other professionals including members of the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). Wherever possible, they have talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have analysed performance data, reports and management information that the local authority holds to inform its work with children and young people.
5. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.
6. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector.
7. This inspection was carried out under Section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

8. The London Borough of Bromley has approximately 68,100 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 23% of the total population. Children and young people of school age from minority ethnic groups account for 28.6% of the total population, compared with 24.3% in the country as a whole. Some 4.7% of children and young people are of Black African background and Bromley has one of the largest groups of settled Gypsies and Travellers in England.
9. Early help for children and families in Bromley is provided by the Education and Care Services department of the local authority and located within the Bromley Children Project, Targeted Youth Support (which includes the youth offending service), Common Assessment Framework (CAF) team and community support services commissioned by the council. Delivery is provided through six mainstream children's centres located in areas of greatest need, tailored outreach family support interventions and targeted youth programmes. One further children's centre provides dedicated support to children with severe disabilities.

10. Contacts and referrals for targeted services to children's social care are managed through the centralised referral and assessment service, which includes a multi-agency support hub (MASH) as an initial point of contact and Teenager and Parent Support Service (TAPSS). Two safeguarding and care planning teams provide a service to children in need and children subject to child protection plans. There is also an out of hours service.

Overall effectiveness

Adequate

11. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in the London Borough of Bromley is judged to be adequate. Clear strategic vision and leadership is in place that has made some significant improvements to practice and service delivery from a low base. Staffing levels have improved resulting in substantial improvement in the timeliness of assessments and responses from children's social care. The stability of the children's social care workforce has led to better engagement with other agencies and enhanced partnership working. Early intervention services and child protection services are aligned under the same management structure improving the coordination and delivery of services to children and families. However, senior leaders are aware that further work is required to sustain the improvements made to date and address current weaknesses.
12. Thresholds are clear and understood by a full range of agencies. A suitably wide range of services are in place to enable early identification of children who require additional targeted support, especially those children aged 0-11 years. Partner agencies work well within the structure of team around the child (TAC), supported by the CAF team, engaging families at an early stage to prevent the need for statutory intervention. A multi-agency support hub (MASH) has been established and while the multi-agency dimension of this is under development, a prompt response is made to all contacts from the public and partner agencies. Effective arrangements are in place within children's social care to protect children from immediate risk of harm. However, assessments do not always identify all needs beyond those concerning the immediate risk of harm. This leads to some re-referrals and delays in meeting children's wider needs promptly. Although some very good examples of assessments were seen, their overall quality is too variable and some do not focus sufficiently on risk or fully consider the child's ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability. In a small number of cases very recent appropriate action was taken to ensure that children known to the local authority for some time and experiencing neglect were progressed into safeguarding processes. Older children who receive a service from TAPSS are supported to remain with their family. The needs of younger children in the same household are not always routinely assessed. It is not yet known if this service is having sufficient impact in reducing the reception of children into the care of the local authority.
13. When children become subject of a child protection plan good multi-agency involvement continues with regular and well attended meetings. However, plans are not sufficiently outcome focused to monitor progress and ensure that parents are clear about what needs to change for their children to be effectively protected. The work of partners does not

routinely focus on the experiences of the child and whether interventions are improving outcomes for them. While children and young people involved in child protection processes are seen regularly by their social worker they are rarely offered the support of an advocate or the opportunity to be involved in case conferences.

14. Senior leaders have the valuable support of elected members who also provide regular scrutiny. However, elected members have not routinely attended the BSCB and do not yet provide the same challenge across the partnership. The BSCB is meeting its statutory duties and members provide sufficient challenge to drive improvement activity based on robust analysis of performance information that is well focused on early intervention and child protection practice. However, they do not routinely focus on the outcomes of activity. A new independent chair of the BSCB has recently been appointed and has already provided challenge to the Board about the need to re-focus on outcomes, although it is too early to see the impact of this.
15. Performance management within the BSCB and children's social care has focused significantly on improving key performance indicators. This has been appropriate given the previously poor performance and compliance. However, performance management frameworks are not yet sufficiently robust to drive improvement in the quality of practice and improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Service development is not yet influenced by children and families who have experienced child in need and child protection services.

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers

Adequate

16. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers is adequate.
17. Most early help and intervention for young children is timely and focused and is particularly well delivered by the Bromley Children Project. A very useful assessment tool is being piloted which enables parents and the service to measure the impact of the intervention and improved outcomes for young people. For older children and young people support is available locally through targeted youth support and the Teenage and Parent Support Service (TAPSS). While some useful interventions have assisted some very vulnerable young people, TAPSS support is not well coordinated; child in need plans are not routinely used to focus families and professionals in meeting the young persons needs. The impact of the support provided by the service is not effectively measured or evaluated.

18. The common assessment framework (CAF) works well and partners are increasingly confident in its use. Team around the child (TAC) meetings ensure that young people's voices on an individual basis are well represented. Effective communication and collaborative working between agencies is evident in most cases and this leads to well coordinated services to support children and young people. Parents and carers appreciate the early help they receive. CAF coordinators, who are social work qualified, receive all CAFs and assist with the chairing of complex TAC meetings. This intervention ensures that thresholds are consistently applied and concerns are appropriately referred to children's social care services when necessary. Intervention is proportionate and families are not subjected to formal child protection when this is not necessary.
19. When children require statutory intervention from children's social care, appropriate referrals are made by a wide range of other agencies working with children and their families. The response from children's social care to those children at risk of immediate harm is appropriate. However in some cases which are assessed as lower risk, children's social care services either do not respond effectively or close the case too early. As a result, professionals make re-referrals to secure a further response from children's social care on less immediate concerns. This means that opportunities are lost by children's social care to effectively support children at an earlier stage.
20. Children known to children's social care are visited regularly and social workers have a good understanding of children's circumstances. In most cases this leads to adequate outcomes enabling children to remain safely at home with their parents. However, there is little evidence to reflect how the child experiences the involvement of agencies and the impact of the services that they receive. While case files mostly record the ethnicity of the child or young person, religion, language and disability are not routinely recorded and all these factors are not consistently considered in assessments and planning. The interpreting service is well used and enables parents to contribute fully to intervention processes. The use of advocates is not promoted effectively, although parents are encouraged to attend meetings and are often supported by family members. While very small numbers of young people have attended child protection conferences, current local authority processes, including the timing of these meetings, mean that young people are not routinely invited to attend. Most children are removed from a child protection plan at an appropriate stage. Step down monitoring arrangements are mostly robust although the level at which sustained improvements have been achieved are not analysed by way of impact on the need for re-referrals back to children's social care.
21. Parents who spoke to inspectors overwhelmingly valued the support they have received from the Bromley Children Project and the early help they receive from other partners. However, parents' views on the intervention

offered by children's social care were more variable. Many parents agreed that their involvement was necessary, although not all were clear about the extent of the risks or how the intervention was going to help reduce risks. Some parents felt that they are not listened to or understood. A few parents did not have sufficient information about how to make a complaint.

22. A multi-agency planning meeting has recently been introduced to coordinate support to young people who have been identified as at risk of sexual exploitation. While this is not yet fully embedded, interventions to date reflect effective and collaborative partnership working. Well targeted plans have been developed for identified young people and this has resulted in effective strategies to reduce risk. Commissioned services provided by Barnardo's have been particularly successful in engaging young people in a sustained way leading to positive changes in behaviour. Further examples were seen of effective information sharing between children's social care services and partner agencies, including the Maternity Concerns meeting. This successfully ensures that high risk pre-birth cases are identified at an early stage and appropriate actions and plans are put in place. Family group conferencing is targeted to ensure that all family care options are fully explored to support parents in crisis. This has clearly delivered improved outcomes for children and young people and their families.

The quality of practice

Adequate

23. The quality of practice is adequate.
24. Children and young people who are the subject of assessments and other interventions are routinely seen, and seen alone where appropriate. Social workers use a range of approaches to build relationships with children and secure their views which are incorporated in records, and in most cases inform work undertaken. Observations of pre-verbal children are used to understand their feelings.
25. Universal services across the partnership refer cases appropriately. Thresholds for referral to social care services are generally understood and applied, with most cases progressed or closed appropriately at contact and referral stages. Professionals in universal and targeted provision are able to receive sound advice on children's social care and safeguarding matters from the MASH, including on whether thresholds for social care intervention are met. MASH responds promptly to contacts from other professionals and the public. Historic information and that from other agencies are considered and inform decision-making. Cases requiring social care involvement are escalated appropriately to the referral and assessment team. Inspectors found improvements in the functioning of

the emergency duty team in response to the findings of previous inspections. In particular, communication with day services is now aided by more robust information systems and backup arrangements as well as a deputy team manager who has a designated link role with the emergency duty team which enables regular formal and informal dialogue.

26. The findings of Section 47 enquiries are recorded clearly with some analysis of risk factors in almost all cases. However, the overall quality of Section 47 enquiries is too variable. Some are conducted thoroughly, with full background checks and evaluation of information and observations. However, others are less thorough, with no evidence of a full range of agency checks being undertaken and recorded. This means that early decision making in Section 47 enquiries too often takes place without consideration of full information. This is compounded by the lack of a multi-agency strategy meeting at the outset. Almost all strategy meetings are conducted between children's social care and the police by telephone which does not always enable a full consideration of all the background information held by other partners.
27. The timeliness of initial and core assessments has improved but the quality is too variable. Some include good analysis that draw together salient information and use research to support understanding and inform actions. Others are less thorough and are too descriptive. This is also true of reports to child protection conferences and child in need meetings, where the lack of analysis hampers effective outcome focused planning. Quality assurance of CAF and TAC processes enables proactive support and challenge and leads to good quality assessments with corresponding interventions.
28. Child protection plans are, in most cases, too general and insufficiently focused on reducing risk. Core group meetings take place regularly and are well attended by relevant professionals and parents. However, these meetings are not fully effective at developing the outline plan, agreed at child protection conferences, into a broader working tool which enables professionals to be clear with parents about desired outcomes and how these will be achieved. The council has recognised this and is implementing the strengthening families model in response. This model is based on better engagement with families by developing outcome focused plans. Child protection and child in need plans are shared with family members, but families do not always understand what needs to change. While review child protection conferences and core groups monitor compliance with the plan, they do not explicitly address the extent to which risk has reduced. Child in need plans are similarly lacking in an outcomes focus. In some cases, the lack of effective monitoring and review has led to enduring or emerging neglect factors going unrecognised. Most young people and families supported by TAPSS do not have a written plan and as a result, interventions are unfocused and do

not take into account potential significant risks and needs arising for younger siblings. Too often there is insufficient consideration given to contingency planning for children and young people.

29. First and second line managers exercise oversight of casework through formal and informal supervision and workflow monitoring. Decisions are recorded though they do not always establish specific actions with timescales. Management oversight is largely effective in ensuring that work progresses, but supervision records do not show evidence of challenge and reflection in relation to casework issues. Poor performance is dealt with robustly when recognised. In one case file, inspectors observed that a management file audit led to discernible improvement in practice.
30. Most case recording is up to date and social workers are normally able to locate key documents quickly. However, there are delays in adding some core group records to the electronic social care record. The council has recognised that chronologies are not routinely completed and do not inform ongoing decision making and has recently commissioned mandatory training for staff to ensure improvement in this area.

Leadership and governance

Adequate

31. Leadership and governance is adequate. Strategic leaders have ensured that child protection and early help are prioritised. A restructure in October 2011 has aligned early intervention services such as the Bromley Children Project, children's centres and the CAF team with statutory children's services improving escalation and step down arrangements. MASH has been established and although not yet fully multi-agency, it is effectively triaging contacts from partners, providing clear signposting advice as well as escalating concerns. The local authority has taken appropriate action to address significant workforce recruitment and retention issues with full political support. As a result social work vacancies have fallen from 40% in February 2010 and currently stand at 17%. Current vacancies represent additional posts that are currently covered by agency workers while staff gain social work qualifications through the 'Step-Up to Social Work' scheme and through support to existing unqualified staff to gain social work qualifications. Extra front line management capacity has also been secured which ensures that staff have access to regular support. There has been a significant focus on achieving compliance in a number of aspects of practice. The timeliness of initial assessments has improved from 23.1% in 2009/10 to 90% in 2011/12, and currently stands at over 95%. The local authority can demonstrate that children known to children's social care are seen and

spoken to on a regular basis. With increased stability of staff, improved engagement with partners is evident and some strong partnership arrangements are in place. These include the response to domestic abuse, recent developments to support young people at risk of sexual exploitation and the engagement of adult drug and alcohol services.

32. Despite these clear improvements in the provision of early help and child protection services a number of weaknesses remain. While the majority of these are known to the local authority and are underpinned by an improvement plan, progress is variable and in some areas insufficient progress has been made. The engagement of families in service improvement activity is underdeveloped. The early identification of neglect and timely responses by the local authority to put effective multi-agency plans in place to reduce the likelihood of harm for children subject to neglect is not consistent.
33. The quality of practice is still too variable. Performance information is available and has been used effectively to monitor compliance and identify trends. The quality assurance framework is not yet robust in driving improvement in the quality of work and effectiveness of practice. A programme of themed audits occurs. Themes are determined by the analysis of performance information and resulting audits do provide sound analysis on which to base improvements. Resulting action plans inform the service improvement plan and some improvement in quality of practice has resulted. While first and second line managers do undertake regular file audits there is no focus to these audits as no standard template is used, the findings are not collated and so learning and improved practice is limited to individual casework and individual practitioners. Senior managers recognise the need to focus on quality of practice and have invested in a coordinated package of multi-agency training to improve the skill base of staff but it is too early to see the impact of this on practice. Limited work has progressed to capture the views of children and families involved in child protection processes and their voice does not yet influence service improvement.
34. The post of Director of Children's Services (DCS) has been vacant since 1 April 2012. Clear and appropriate arrangements are in place between the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care to discharge the statutory functions of the DCS post. An initial round of recruitment did not identify a suitable candidate. A second round is progressing and nearing a conclusion. This vacancy has not had a detrimental effect on the functioning of the service in the interim. Regular meetings are in place with the Lead Member for Children's Services, who is also the Leader of the Council. This demonstrates the high priority that is given to children's services in Bromley by elected members. The Lead Member is assisted in carrying out elected member functions by the Care Services portfolio holder, assistant portfolio holder and the member's Children's Champion. Elected members are supportive of strategic leaders

within the local authority and provide a sufficient level of challenge through the lead member, the portfolio holder and the Care Services Policy, Development and Scrutiny committee (PDS). However, elected members do not yet give the BSCB sufficient challenge by attending routinely. Attendance by the new lead member and portfolio holders is planned for the coming year at both the BSCB and executive board meetings.

35. The BSCB meets its statutory duties although it recognises that it needs to improve the scrutiny it gives to the impact and outcomes of the wide and varied activity that it leads. Members are committed and there is appropriate cross representation on the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Children’s Partnership Board and the BSCB to ensure a co-ordinated approach to service improvement with appropriate challenge between strategic leaders. A new independent chair has recently been appointed to the BSCB who has already provided clear challenge to the Board about the need to refocus on the impact of the Board’s functioning. For example, a recent serious case review highlighted multi-agency weaknesses in responding to neglect. While the findings from this serious case review have been widely shared with staff across the partnership and the BSCB has agreed that the focus of its annual conference is neglect, insufficient monitoring and oversight has been brought to existing child in need cases to identify and respond to neglect in a timely manner.
36. Staff generally report that they have access to regular supervision and that managers are accessible. Newly qualified social workers (NQS) report that they are well supported by existing staff, a NQS programme and mentoring. Some agency social workers have been recruited to permanent posts. Caseloads are manageable and there is clear monitoring and commitment from senior managers to maintain these at reasonable levels. The workforce is diverse and appropriately reflects the community.

Record of main findings

Local authority arrangements for the protection of children	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers	Adequate
The quality of practice	Adequate
Leadership and governance	Adequate