

24 March 2017

Mr Ade Adetosoye  
London Borough of Bromley  
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Dear Mr Adetosoye

## **Second monitoring visit to Bromley's local authority children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Bromley children's services on 22 and 23 February 2017. This is the second monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate for overall effectiveness in June 2016. The inspectors were Marcie Taylor HMI and Tara Geere HMI.

The local authority is very recently beginning to make progress in improving some services for children and young people. Within the cases reviewed, no children were considered to be at immediate or significant risk of harm.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the areas of help and protection and children looked after, including:

- the understanding and application of thresholds to care
- decision-making and planning in relation to permanence for children and for those who return home from care
- the use of and effectiveness of public law outline and the quality and timeliness of court applications and assessments
- the understanding and application of thresholds, timeliness and multi-agency contributions to Section 47 enquiries, strategy discussions, and the escalation of concerns from child in need to child protection
- the quality and timeliness of management oversight and decision-making; the focus on the child in the quality of recording and social work capacity and caseloads.

The visit considered a broad range of evidence, including electronic case records, other supporting documentation and discussions with a range of staff, including managers, social workers and other practitioners.

## **Overview**

Within the cases considered, there is very recent improved practice that is leading to improved outcomes for some children and families in Bromley. Multi-agency information is starting to contribute to strategy discussions, and this is leading to more proportionate, timely and appropriate actions and compliance with statutory guidance. Recent improvements to the quality of recording are starting to evidence the voice of the child, and examples were seen of direct work with children that is helping to improve their outcomes, albeit from very low starting points. A new, permanent and experienced senior management team is having a positive impact and while this has taken time to establish, the result is a more recent acceleration to the pace of change.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Based on the evidence gathered during the visit, we identified areas where some improvement is occurring, and some areas where we considered progress has not yet met the expectations stated within the local authority's action plan.

Since the appointment of the Deputy Chief Executive, Executive Director for Education, Care and Health Services in December 2016, decisive action to make changes to the senior management team has resulted in a tangible acceleration of pace to implement change. The new, permanent, experienced senior management team is having a positive impact, and social workers report that line managers are more visible and accessible, giving them assurance that practice will be different and improving going forward. Achieving practical changes, such as the introduction of mobile phones and laptops, is a very tangible sign to the workforce that things are changing and this is helping staff to feel confident about the future.

The 'Roadmap to Excellence' sets the vision for services to children and families and includes clear expectations set out in practice standards that identify priority areas for improvement. The use of the phrase 'we will improve practice by' reinforces this message and is giving confidence to staff that children's safety and well-being in Bromley is a priority.

With the support of the leader of the council, the new lead member for children's services and the chief executive, the council has provided a significant financial commitment to children's services. This has been used to increase capacity at all levels and has led to a more effective management grip on practice. The reduced caseload promise is targeted to provide the best opportunity for high-quality social work to improve outcomes for children and families. Staff and managers welcome this. Caseloads are starting to reduce slowly across the whole workforce, and where

this is apparent improved capacity is starting to lead to work that is more purposeful with children.

The recent introduction of 'triple lock', a systematic approach to facilitating real-time learning and reflective practice, is supporting and empowering first-line managers to improve the timeliness and quality of decision-making. It provides senior managers with a better line of sight to frontline practice. As a result of compliance with statutory guidance, section 47 enquiries and strategy discussions are leading to more proportionate and appropriate assessment and management of risk, informed by multi-agency information at an early stage. In the small sample of cases considered, risk was better understood and responded to. The threshold for escalation from child in need to child protection demonstrated authoritative action proportionate to risk.

Social workers spoken to know their cases well. Inspectors saw some improvement in the quality of recording on the electronic case files, although further work is needed to capture fully the impact of social work help and support. Within the cases considered, the views of children were seen to have been sought and reflected, where appropriate, in plans. Direct work with these children was evident. Most social workers spoken to are now receiving regular supervision and support. This is beginning to include reflections on practice and increasingly confident guidance by managers to progress work.

The operational response to child sexual exploitation and those who go missing is at a very early stage of development. The establishment of a multi-agency team, 'Atlas', demonstrates commitment from the local authority and its partners to build on the emerging and improved strategic partnership arrangements noted on the first monitoring visit in November 2016. A newly appointed child sexual exploitation coordinator has re-established a multi-agency panel that has reviewed 37 children assessed as at risk, resulting in these young people receiving appropriate support and help. The introduction of a child sexual exploitation assessment tool is prompting social workers to identify and manage risk more quickly. The work of 'Atlas' is beginning to result in more proactive planning to prevent children going missing.

There is improved timeliness and consideration of permanence planning for children. A permanence and planning panel promotes rigorous oversight by senior managers, and the newly appointed director of children's social care now authorises all decisions about children becoming looked after. She also agrees plans for children returning home. During this visit, inspectors found plans that are appropriate, realistic and sustainable. The local authority is still in the early stages of reviewing all children looked after under Section 20 to determine actions, including legal interventions if appropriate. The quality and consistency of legal advice has started to improve, assisted by additional capacity and experience within the legal team. The intended impact of the public law outline is now starting to help families to understand concerns and to work more effectively with them to support improved experiences

for children. Earlier consideration of permanence options for children is beginning to improve the timeliness of care proceedings.

Overall, this visit found recent improvements in some key areas of practice. However, many of these improvements are very recent or are not yet fully in place to address the deficits identified in the inspection in June 2016. The newly established senior management team, the additional management and social work capacity and more apparent partnership contributions are starting to make a difference to improve the quality of help to some children and families. The pace of change has only recently accelerated, and while many of the necessary changes are starting to have a positive impact, the momentum of improvement needs to be maintained to ensure that all children in Bromley have their needs understood and met in a timely manner.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website

Yours sincerely

Marcie Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**