

16 February 2011

Mr Chris Spencer
Corporate Director, Education and Children's Services
London Borough of Hillingdon
Civic Centre
High St
Uxbridge
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Dear Mr Spencer

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Hillingdon 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 the London Borough of Hillingdon Council which was conducted on 18 and 19 January 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. 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.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2009 have been addressed with the exception of partner agencies implementation and awareness of thresholds for referral.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Initial assessments seen by inspectors are consistently of a very high quality.



They lead to sound decision making and effective planning to meet the needs of children and young people. Assessments are comprehensive and contain well evidenced and balanced analysis. Risk and protective factors are consistently identified, well evaluated and planning includes clear contingency strategies.

- The diverse needs of children and young people are dealt with sensitively and where relevant equality and diversity issues actively inform assessments and plans for safeguarding. Attention to equality and diversity is prominent throughout case recording and evident in how services are delivered. Excellent local resources are used to meet the identified cultural needs of children and families, for example, links to multicultural support groups and key workers in the community.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Decision making on contacts and referrals is appropriate and timely. These are recorded clearly and there is evidence of consistent management oversight with identified directions to social workers.
- Section 47 enquiries are prioritised appropriately. These are always carried out by a suitably experienced and qualified social worker. Child protection investigations demonstrate comprehensive information gathering and decision making is effective and evidence based.
- Safeguarding procedures comply with statutory requirements. Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales and assessments of children's needs are prioritised effectively.
- Partnership working between statutory agencies, on allocated cases, is sound and contributes to the safeguarding of children and young people.
- Case recording is up-to-date. This enables staff and managers to track and assess significant events which facilitates effective decision making.
- Children are routinely seen and their wishes and feelings form an integral part of assessments and planning for their future care.
- The department has effective working relationships with the police and these have led to efficient joint-working to safeguard children and young people.
- Staff report that caseloads are manageable. All cases are now allocated immediately and this has enabled a fast response to children and their families in need.
- The common assessment framework is well established and provides effective early intervention services to children and families. A comprehensive and ongoing training programme has been delivered to staff to enable consistency

in the use of the framework.

- Links between the emergency duty team and the referral and assessment team are smooth and information is shared promptly and effectively.
- A successful recruitment campaign has significantly reduced the number of agency staff. This has resulted in an improvement in the timeliness and quality of initial and core assessments. Children and families now benefit from greater consistency of service provision.
- Quality assurance processes are well established. An audit programme of safeguarding cases is undertaken by senior managers and the findings are routinely used to improve practice and service delivery.
- Social workers have a range of training opportunities available to them and are able to access external training to develop practice and improve service delivery.
- Staff supervision is undertaken regularly. It is reflective, analytical, provides effective support and contributes to improving practice.

Areas for development

- There continues to be a lack of clarity between partner agencies about the thresholds for referrals to the referral and assessment team. Although action to make improvements is underway this is yet to show sustained impact. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection in July 2010.
- Whilst the referral and assessment team complete chronologies consistently, the children with disabilities team do not routinely use chronologies to assist in analysis and decision making regarding safeguarding of children and young people.
- One member of staff who is not a qualified social worker has undertaken both initial and core assessments although this work was of a satisfactory standard. This is not consistent with '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' 2010.

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

Yours sincerely

Emmy Tomsett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Hugh Dunnachie, Chief Executive, London Borough of Hillingdon Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education