

15 December 2010

Ms Frankie Sulke
Executive Director
London Borough of Lewisham
Laurence House
1 Catford Road
London
SE6 4RU

Dear Ms Sulke

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Lewisham 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 Lewisham Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 November 2010. 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 area of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in March 2010 regarding families receiving copies of assessments has been addressed.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The council has robust mechanisms in place for the management and improvement of performance and quality. Regular and wide ranging thematic



and service audits are undertaken. Senior managers took prompt and effective action when audits indicated deficiencies within the children with disabilities service. This has resulted in strengthened safeguarding arrangements and improved management and practice.

- Children and families and their carers benefit significantly from a range of social workers with a specialist focus within the referral and assessment service, such as domestic abuse and children going missing. Privately fostered children are effectively safeguarded through a designated private fostering social worker, who has successfully raised awareness and identification of private fostering arrangements, and carries out targeted work with specific community groups.

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

- Decision making by managers at the point of contact is timely. Historical information is routinely considered as part of the decision making process.
- Prompt action is taken when children are identified as being at risk and in need of safeguarding. Subsequent child protection investigations are thorough and undertaken by suitably qualified social workers.
- The referral and assessment teams provide a responsive service. Service users benefit from having the same social worker from the point of allocation through assessment to either case closure or transfer to a longer term team.
- At the time of the inspection there were no unallocated cases within the referral and assessment teams.
- The quality and timeliness of initial and core assessments examined by inspectors are good. Risk and protective factors are explicitly considered and issues of equality and diversity are fully explored, with access to translation services as required.
- Views of children, young people and their families are routinely included within assessments and are clearly being taken into account within case planning.
- Service users' views of the service are sought on a regular basis and are used to inform quality and service improvements.
- Case recording seen by inspectors is up-to-date. Management oversight is clearly evidenced and entered onto the electronic case record.
- Robust arrangements are in place for the transfer of cases. Managers ensure that cases to be transferred are fully up-to-date and include chronologies and transfer summaries. As a result, capacity to accommodate incoming and ongoing assessment work is well managed. Staff report that their caseloads

are generally manageable.

- Staff are well supported by regular formal individual and group supervision. Professional development is promoted through access to a good range of training opportunities and to relevant research. Lessons from serious case reviews have been effectively disseminated.
- The referral and assessment service benefits from a stable and experienced workforce. The council demonstrates a strong commitment to internal professional career progression. An effective recruitment and retention strategy, which includes the provision of bursaries, results in a high proportion of permanent staff. Newly qualified social workers spoke highly of the support that they receive.
- Safeguarding within the referral and assessment teams and the children with disabilities team is strengthened by formal arrangements for consultancy and advice from child protection co-ordinators.
- Strong and effective partnership working, for example through the multi-agency targeted family support panel, enables children and their families to receive timely and appropriate support and services.
- The common assessment framework (CAF) is well established across a range of partner agencies. Decisive action has been taken to embed the use of the CAF and team around the child processes as a pre-requisite to referral to children's social care (with the clear exception for child protection concerns). Targeted multi-agency training is being held to increase understanding of thresholds and individual agency responsibilities.
- The emergency duty team (EDT) provides a responsive and appropriate out-of-hours service. Timely alerts about cases combined with regular meetings result in strong links between the EDT and the referral and assessment service.

Areas for development

- Child protection plans do not always include measurable timescales for agreed actions.
- The content and quality of individual supervision records are inconsistent and records do not routinely demonstrate critical reflection. Timescales for agreed actions are not always clear. Senior managers have identified supervision as an area for improvement and a new supervision policy has recently been introduced.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Sands
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, London Borough of Lewisham
Marion Saunders, Chair of Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Robert Massey, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, London Borough of Lewisham
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education