

31 March 2010

Ms Frankie Sulke
Executive Director
Laurence House
Catford Road
Catford
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 contains 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 2 and 3 March 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but one area for development, which is detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Appropriate decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Most initial and core assessments are of high quality and lead to appropriate planning for children and young people. Their timeliness is above the national average.



- Most child protection (Section 47) enquiries are thorough and timely and are always carried out by a qualified social worker.
- Senior managers have good oversight of front line decision making and take decisions as required about complex family situations.
- Regular and well established random audits of case files enable senior managers to oversee and improve the quality of the duty and assessment service.
- Consideration of equality and diversity issues is strongly reflected in casework practice and planning. Effective specialist support services are provided to meet the needs of the diverse population.
- Social workers have good access to regular supervision and value the professional advice and support provided by line managers.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and area for development were also identified:

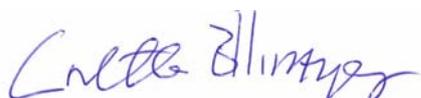
Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inter-agency policies and procedures are good and accessible to staff. Thresholds are clear and are effectively applied with timely referrals of individual children from partner agencies, ensuring vulnerable children are promptly identified and supported. ▪ The out of hours service is effective, well resourced and well co-ordinated with daytime services. ▪ The common assessment framework is well established. Multi-agency working through this framework supports children and young people well. ▪ Assessments engage children, young people and parents well and result in clear planning and provision of support. ▪ Good training and development opportunities are promoted and well regarded by social workers. This has included recent learning from serious case reviews. ▪ Children and young people have good access to a wide range of specialist voluntary sector provision. ▪ The council has responded well to an identified need by developing a missing person's service; this ensures that vulnerable children and young people who have absconded from foster placements, residential or families are offered timely and appropriate support on their return.

- A good recruitment and retention policy has resulted in very low numbers of agency staff in the referral and assessment service.

Areas for development

- Families are informed, orally of the outcomes of assessments, but they do not routinely receive written copies and are therefore not able to check the accuracy of information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Colette Elliott-Cooper".

Colette Elliott-Cooper
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, London Borough of Lewisham
Marion Saunders, Chair of Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board
Robert Massey, Lead Member for Children's Services
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families