

# London Borough of Islington

**Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers**

and

**Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board<sup>1</sup>**

Inspection date: 28 April – 25 May 2017

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<b>Children’s services in Islington are good</b>		
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		Good
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>		Outstanding

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

## Executive summary

Children's services in Islington benefit from highly ambitious, capable and confident operational and political leadership. The population of Islington is richly diverse. Some localities have high levels of social deprivation, and many families in need of support have highly complex needs. The borough has a number of challenges in relation to gang culture, knife crime and substance misuse. Nevertheless, almost all vulnerable children who come into contact with children's services receive good support from resilient and well-managed staff. Building on the safeguarding and children looked after inspection of 2012, services continue to be good, underpinned by outstanding leadership, management and governance.

Elected members are passionate and actively involved as corporate parents. They engage well with young people and take their views seriously. Members take an active role in quality assurance activity and have a good level of understanding of frontline practice. This enables them to scrutinise practice effectively.

Performance management is very strong at strategic and operational levels. Leaders and managers know their service very well and are clear about their priorities for improvement. Management oversight, monitoring arrangements and supervision provide clear guidance to social workers regarding progression of actions and timescales.

Effective joint commissioning arrangements are underpinned by a robust assessment of local needs. This results in services that reflect the diverse communities in the borough.

Early help provision in Islington is both of high quality and effective. Comprehensive early help and targeted services focus on improving children's circumstances before they reach the threshold for statutory services.

When children who are, or may be, at risk of significant harm are referred to the local authority, action is taken quickly to ensure their safety. The local authority has identified that, for other children, processes at the front door are not sufficiently streamlined, and action is being taken to ensure a consistent response.

Social workers see children regularly. They get to know them well through good-quality direct work and they build relationships of trust with them. This helps to improve the outcomes that children achieve. Social workers are supported in doing this by having manageable caseloads. There is a strong focus on, and investment in, recruiting sufficient social workers to make this possible. This has a positive impact on reducing staff turnover and reliance on agency staff. The professional development of social workers is supported by well-planned and resourced training.

Children and families benefit from high-quality, focused and timely assessments, which reflect the seriousness and urgency of their needs, identifying the key risks

and protective factors. The subsequent plans identify appropriate goals, although the quality of plans is more variable. Most children have good access to advocates.

Young people at risk of child sexual exploitation receive excellent support, which is delivered with sensitivity and persistence. The monitoring of children who go missing is managed well by the 'missing children' coordinator. However, the quality of return home interviews when children have been missing is too variable.

Children and young people at risk of radicalisation, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour-based violence are protected through a range of clear multi-agency arrangements.

Islington has an extensive, well-coordinated network of services to help children and families address difficulties concerning domestic abuse, substance misuse and parental mental ill health. Consequently, children are protected from harm.

Decisions for children to become looked after are made quickly and in their best interests. Children only become looked after when it is necessary. When legal proceedings are required to secure their safety, assessments and support to children and their families are good and progress is swift. When the plan is for children to return home from care, outcome-focused assessments, planning and support ensure that the decisions are safe and appropriate. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive excellent support.

The health needs of children looked after, including those placed outside of Islington, are met very well by a highly motivated team of health professionals. Children looked after receive good support for their education, although personal education plans (PEPs) are not sufficiently targeted, and the impact of the pupil premium grant is not measured effectively.

When children cannot return to their birth families, new permanent homes are found as quickly as possible. When adoption is the agreed plan for the child, there is a relentless focus on securing the right placement at the right time. Children are well prepared and supported. However, life story work and later life letters are variable in quality. The local authority has recognised this and is taking action to ensure that the quality improves. Adopters are very positive about their experiences, including their post-adoption support.

Leaders and managers have high aspirations for care leavers. There is a range of suitable and safe accommodation options to support care leavers with differing support needs. Islington has a strong track record in supporting care leavers to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. Effective preparation for independence and significant tenancy support enable care leavers to sustain their tenancies when they embark on independent living. Pathway planning is timely, but care leavers are not fully involved in determining their goals and the actions required to achieve them. The numbers of care leavers in education, employment and training are increasing.

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## The local authority

### Information about this local authority area<sup>2</sup>

#### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates no children's homes.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in February 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's arrangements for children looked after was in February 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since February 2016.
- The chief executive has been in post since May 2011.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since September 2013.

#### Children living in this area

- Approximately 40,500 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Islington. This is 17.4% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 35.3% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 29.1% (the national average is 14.5%)
  - in secondary schools is 33.6% (the national average is 13.2%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 67% of all children living in the area, compared with 26% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are young people of mixed ethnicity and from the White-Other ethnic group.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 43.7% (the national average is 20.1%)
  - in secondary schools is 45.9% (the national average is 15.7%).
- Islington is a relatively small authority, but has the highest population density in the country. The authority is one of stark contrasts, with high levels of deprivation and areas of significant wealth.

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<sup>2</sup> The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

## **Child protection in this area**

- At 31 March 2017, 2,902 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 2,401 at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 March 2017, 205 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 161 at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 March 2017, five children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from three at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years prior to this inspection, two serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted, and two serious case reviews (SCRs) have been completed. One SCR was in progress at the time of the inspection.

## **Children looked after in this area**

- At 31 March 2017, 343 children were being looked after by the local authority. This is lower than the 353 children at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
  - 229 (67%) live outside the local authority area
  - 24 live in residential children's homes, all of whom live out of the authority area
  - none live in a residential special school<sup>3</sup>
  - 254 live with foster families, of whom 65% live out of the authority area
  - 10 live with parents, one of whom lives out of the authority area
  - 51 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
  - there have been 14 adoptions
  - 21 children became the subject of special guardianship orders, 15 of whom had been looked after
  - 210 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 4.8% subsequently returned to be looked after
  - four young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
  - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation.

## **The casework model used in this area**

- The local authority uses its own motivational social work model.

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<sup>3</sup> These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

## Recommendations

1. The local authority to work together with partner agencies to improve the quality of referrals, to ensure that all information is available as early as possible, so that there is no delay to taking prompt action.
2. Ensure that plans for children are concise and clear and that children in need reviews and core groups effectively measure and record the progress of the child against the plan.
3. Take action to improve the engagement of children and young people in return home interviews, and ensure that all return home interviews effectively identify risk and result in clear safety plans.
4. Ensure that PEPs for children looked after involve children and young people and are specific about targets and achievements.
5. Ensure that the virtual school measures the impact of pupil premium spend for children looked after, so that the grant is used to best effect.
6. Ensure that care leavers are more engaged in the completion and review of their pathway plans, so that the plans become more meaningful.

## Summary for children and young people

- Children and families in Islington receive high-quality services when they need them.
- Children and families are provided with a wide range of services to help and support them to feel safe. Social workers act quickly when children need help and protection. Senior leaders make sure that everyone understands the problems faced by children and young people and that different agencies work together well to protect them.
- Social workers, teachers, police and health workers work well together to help things to get better for children and families. This means that problems are often solved at an early stage.
- Children and young people at risk of sexual or gang exploitation are helped by specially trained workers to make them safe.
- Senior leaders and councillors have a passion to make things better for all children. They want them to do well. This is making a positive difference to young people's lives.
- Social workers spend time getting to know children and families. They are good at listening to children and understanding things that are important, such as how they feel and where they want to live.
- Children and their families who arrive from different countries are provided with good help and advice.
- When children and young people are unable to live with their parents, social workers find them a good home with caring adults. Social workers always try to keep brothers and sisters together, and enable children to see people who are important to them. If it is safe for children to return home, social workers make sure that families continue to get the help that they need for as long as they need it.
- Social workers make every effort to find the best possible families for children who need to be adopted. When children and young people cannot return home to live with their parents, social workers need to give them more information to help them to understand the reasons why this needs to happen and to have information about their background.
- Care leavers are getting good support to prepare them for independence.
- Most care leavers are living in suitable accommodation and are given good information about their rights and the things that they are entitled to.
- Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET), but numbers are now improving.



<b>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p>Children in Islington receive high-quality and effective early help support. This is due to an accessible range of early and targeted support delivered by committed multi-agency professionals. Staff implement specific plans on completion of holistic early help assessments. The shared vision and priority of prevention and a 'Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family' principle are strong features of the early help offer, so children and families receive consistently good support services when they need them.</p> <p>Strong multi-agency partnership working and inclusion of children's views are integral across early help, targeted and specialist intervention. These result in children having a clear voice on decisions made about their lives. Children with child protection plans have additional help to express their views and can access advocacy services.</p> <p>Children needing early help intervention or immediate protection are effectively identified and receive a prompt and efficient response from the front door by the children's services contact team. However, contacts are variable in quality, so in some cases it is unclear what service or help is needed.</p> <p>Children's assessments are analytical and child-focused. They are informed by research on complex family difficulties, including domestic abuse, and they identify the significant events in children's lives. Inclusion of children's views means that all information gathered is used effectively to inform appropriate decision-making, risk assessments and plans. Children missing from home and school receive an effective response. However, return home interviews for children are too variable in quality.</p> <p>Children and families are set appropriate and realistic goals following assessments. Not all children have good-quality plans or concise actions supporting how the goals will be achieved. This, combined with inconsistent recording of meetings that review plans, means that, for a small number of children, it is not easy to identify progress.</p> <p>Social workers receive good support from the expertise of co-located specialist workers, including the child sexual exploitation and 'missing' coordinator and the integrated gangs team. This enables social workers to have confidence and growing resilience to help and protect children living in families that have extremely complex and diverse needs. They are passionate about helping families and they build strong relationships with children, which means that they know them well.</p>	

## Inspection findings

7. Children in Islington receive good early help support. The well-established early help offer is implemented by a multi-agency professional workforce that uses its skills to provide targeted interventions across a range of available services. Agencies share a deep-rooted early help vision and effectively adopt a 'Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family' principle that demonstrates their commitment to tackling concerns at an early stage. The early help offer extends to services of support for disabled children and their families, inclusive of a comprehensive local offer and a range of short break opportunities. As a result, children and families receive services targeted to their individual needs.
8. Early intervention teams are successfully implementing the early help and family support strategy 2015–2025. Children's centres have a strong relationship with health partners, and family support workers link to all schools and general practitioner (GP) surgeries. This enables the early identification of children in need of help.
9. Early help assessments are thorough. They consider the whole family's needs and consistently include the views of parents and children. The focus on family strengths as well as areas of concern, using a range of assessment tools, enables a detailed analysis of children's circumstances and the help required to improve their outcomes. Early help plans implemented by multi-agency lead professionals have clear, measurable targets and expected timescales for achieving positive change for children and families. Most children and families receive a proportionate and consistent response to meet their needs. Children's services respond well when children's circumstances change. When risks to their health and welfare increase, effective decisions are made to keep them safe.
10. Children considered at risk of significant harm are quickly identified. All urgent multi-disciplinary requests receive an effective and timely response from a single point of contact in the children's services contact team (CSCT). The CSCT has impressive and experienced senior social workers who utilise a range of resources to access information, including those provided by an integrated multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). This helps to identify the most appropriate service response to meet children's needs, including those of children in need of early help. Children in need of urgent protection transfer quickly to one of six locality children in need teams, resulting in prompt assessment of their needs.
11. When the MASH receives contacts, staff respond effectively to identify risks to children. A wide range of multi-agency intelligence is used to inform effective decision-making, including information from schools and early years support, ensuring that workers have a holistic overview of children's attainment as well as their social and family circumstances. Clearly recorded management oversight and the rationale for overriding consent, if necessary, are

appropriately identified at the point of contact, ensuring robust decision-making relating to children's needs.

12. Some contacts and requests for information are variable in quality. This means that the concerns are not always clear. Senior managers know that these areas need improvement, as a result of a commissioned external review in October 2016. However, the review recommendations have not yet been fully implemented, so for a few children the positive impact is not yet evident. (Recommendation)
13. Children receive a good-quality and timely response from dedicated and committed social workers in the children in need service. Social workers benefit from considerable support and advice from a range of skilled specialist workers co-located across the service. This includes expertise from a dedicated child sexual exploitation and 'missing' coordinator, domestic abuse intervention workers and the integrated gangs team. All workers contribute to the identification of known and anticipated risks to children; shared knowledge is used effectively to inform strategy discussions and analysis in children's assessments.
14. Children's assessments are of high quality. They identify precise risks to children, and social workers give due consideration to the individual needs of brothers and sisters within families. Workers use research effectively to inform their analysis of strengths and risk factors and include significant events in the child's family history. Inspectors saw purposeful examples of this, including research on domestic abuse, honour-based violence and religious beliefs within specific cultures. Social workers understand the emotional impact and stress that children may experience when living within complex family structures and clearly report on the actual impact that this has on children.
15. Social workers build strong relationships with children; they spend time with them and understand their needs well. All workers have an individual staff profile that they share when meeting children for the first time. This enables children to understand why social workers need to be involved with families and helps to build a strong rapport so that workers can ascertain what life is like for them at home. Direct work and children's views are integral to assessments, and the majority give thoughtful consideration to children's identity and cultural needs at home, school and within their communities. Workers in the disabled children's team use a creative range of direct work tools to understand and ensure that those children who have complex communication needs are able to express their views and wishes.
16. Assessments identify the complexity of risks and diverse needs of children. They inform children's plans, and subsequent direct work appropriately enables workers to check on children's progress. Girls at risk of female genital mutilation receive the help and support that they need through early identification of risks. Culturally sensitive analysis demonstrates that social

workers have a good understanding of specific cultures and use this information to inform safety plans for children.

17. Plans for children are not consistently concise or clear. All plans contain appropriate family-focused goals derived from strong assessments, so that parents know exactly what needs to change. However, the actions supporting the achievement of those goals vary in quality and detail. Children in need meetings and core groups that review the progress of children's plans do not consistently evidence progress made. This has led to some delays in the goals of a small number of children being achieved, particularly those children who have experienced more frequent changes in social workers.  
(Recommendation)
18. Most children with child protection plans can access advocacy support to attend or participate in meetings about the progress of their plan. Social workers are diligently helping children to complete 'All about me' books and they promote appropriate advocacy support. As a result, children's wishes and feelings are represented in child protection planning.
19. Multi-agency partnerships and coordination of support to children are exceptionally strong in Islington. These are particularly effective for those children living within families in which there is domestic abuse, parental mental ill health and substance misuse. Lead professionals and social workers co-work with a range of commissioned services to enhance their knowledge of parental risk factors. Specialist workers offer consultations and advice and undertake direct work with children and families. Contingency plans are effective. Families access services when they need support, and this includes therapeutic and practical help.
20. Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) arrangements are extremely effective. Consistent engagement and attendance from over 20 agencies and professionals in MARAC meetings ensure that broad holistic risks are considered for children living with parents identified as having experienced domestic abuse. The impact of domestic abuse is not seen in isolation and is consistently linked to other inter-dependent risks in children's lives, for example gang activity and child sexual exploitation. A dedicated MARAC coordinator vigorously monitors actions. Agencies share information purposefully and effectively. An appropriate level of challenge results in tight safety plans, which reduce risk for children.
21. Children at risk of and subject to child sexual exploitation receive timely and appropriate action to safeguard their welfare. Social workers and child protection coordinators use the expertise of a specialist coordinator in the assessment of risks to children. Complex strategy meetings effectively coordinate multi-agency identification and planning, so that children benefit from comprehensive and high-quality support. This results in interventions being effectively coordinated to minimise any future risks.

22. Children receive an appropriate and swift response when they are missing from home. Coordinated activity endeavours to locate children and ascertain their safety, with effective information sharing on individual children. Children are consistently offered a return home interview when they are found. However, not all children engage with this process, and return home interviews themselves vary in quality. This means that not all information on potential risks to children is identified to inform their safety plans.  
(Recommendation)
23. The local authority and managers are well informed about children missing from school and implement timely and persistent processes to locate them. Good liaison with other professionals, including UK Visas and Immigration, neighbouring boroughs and schools, together with use of data from a variety of information sources, ensure that they are aware of all children missing education in Islington. All children identified without a school place have clear plans in place to meet their education needs.
24. A qualified teacher visits children who are electively home educated at least annually. Robust oversight contributes to all families engaging with the local authority in decisions relating to the education of their children.
25. Experienced workers with a range of multi-disciplinary knowledge provide effective and responsive out-of-hours support to children and families in need of emergency help. Emergency duty team workers visit children to assess their needs and identify any risks to their welfare.
26. Children living within private fostering arrangements receive a good service. Children are seen within statutory timescales and they are seen alone. Assessments are of good quality and appropriately consider the needs and views of children and the parenting capacity of carers.
27. Young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive timely, analytical and thorough assessments. Assessments consider their views and those of their family. Social workers explain to young people their legal entitlements, enabling them to make informed choices about their futures. When young people choose not to be looked after, suitable accommodation and support are provided and are regularly reviewed to ensure that their needs continue to be met.
28. Arrangements for managing allegations against staff, carers and volunteers who work with children in Islington are well managed by the head of safeguarding as the designated officer. Good coordination of activity and strong procedures ensure that effective strategy meetings are held to protect children. Effective work to raise awareness and provide consultation to other agencies results in appropriate referrals. Subsequent action is timely and proportionate to the level of risk identified.

<b>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Services for children looked after in Islington are good. Managers and staff are ambitious and aspirational for children and care leavers, and this is underpinned by a clear vision and strategy to continue to strengthen social work practice. Social workers are committed to the children with whom they work. They know the children well and have trusting relationships, and 'go the extra mile' to support children's needs.</p> <p>Children only become looked after following timely, high-quality assessments, which are clear about risks and what needs to change. When a child returns home, good multi-agency support is in place to make this move successful. Plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that a child's changing needs continue to be met. When a child cannot return home, plans are made early to ensure that there is no delay in identifying a permanent home.</p> <p>Risks for children looked after are recognised, and swift action is taken to reduce them. This includes the risk of child sexual exploitation, going missing from care and gang activity. Children are involved in their safety planning and, when risks increase, managers take effective protective measures to safeguard children.</p> <p>Children live in good, stable homes that meet their needs well. The timeliness of children looked after reviews and children's participation in those reviews are very good.</p> <p>Children looked after who are at the early years foundation stage or key stages 1 or 2 achieve at the same level as their peers. The virtual school headteacher has identified that more work is required to ensure that those children at key stage 4 achieve as they should. PEPs lack input from children, and the targets are not sufficiently explicit. Managers identify this as an area that needs developing.</p> <p>Adoption services are strong. Permanence through adoption is achieved quickly for children from a diverse range of backgrounds and who have complex needs. Matching is very effective. Social workers prepare children well for their transitions. Adopters are very positive about the level of support that they receive throughout their adoption journey, including post-adoption support.</p> <p>Care leavers are well supported, they feel safe where they live and have very good access to health provision. The care leavers' service, Independent Futures, works well with partners to ensure prompt access to services. Care leavers have access to a good range of accommodation. However, they are not sufficiently involved in the development of their pathway plans.</p>	

## Inspection findings

29. Decisions about children becoming looked after are appropriate, timely and based on good-quality assessments. Assessments take family history into account to inform the analysis of risk and needs, and clearly articulate children's and parents' views and wishes. Legal planning meetings are effective, ensuring clarity on the threshold for care, options appraisal and the rationale for decisions made. Effective use of parallel planning and family group conferences ensures that early assessment of extended family members takes place, minimising delay in decision-making for children.
30. Pre-proceedings work is comprehensive and clear on risks and concerns. Social workers ensure that parents understand clearly what needs to happen and how support will be offered. The Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the judiciary are complimentary about the quality of pre-proceedings work and information sharing by social workers, which minimise delay for children in Islington. Care proceedings are progressed within the 26-week threshold with good, well-prepared evidence.
31. Children do not return home from care unless it is safe for them to do so. Accurate assessments outline ongoing risks and the ways in which support will mitigate these. Child-centred plans result in comprehensive and intensive support, meaning that a return home for children can be sustained.
32. The vast majority of assessments of children looked after are of good quality, explicit about risks and needs and include the views of parents and children. Placements of brothers and sisters are generally informed by a thorough exploration of each child's individual needs and those that they have as a brother/sister group. Assessments are not up to date for a very small number of children, resulting in some delay in progressing plans, particularly in confirming permanent placements.
33. The majority of care plans are of good quality and all are reviewed regularly. Placement plans detail children's routines and needs and are specific about the expectations of the local authority and what carers can expect, including delegated authority arrangements. Identity and cultural needs are explicit, and plans reflect how carers will meet these needs. Parents' views inform placement choice. Children make good progress as a direct result of the care that they receive. Parallel planning starts early in order to reduce delay for children, and recommendations regarding permanence are routinely made at the second review. Reviews are effective and timely, ensuring that care plans are implemented in a consistent manner. Children report having opportunities to speak to their independent reviewing officer (IRO) between reviews and are supported to contribute to decisions and plans. Children directly influence how their reviews are conducted.
34. Independent visitor and advocacy services are strong. Disabled children have good access to advocacy support, with a referral to specialist services if their

needs cannot be met in-house. Children and young people confirmed to inspectors that they understand how to make a complaint and receive support to do so. Numbers of children and young people (including care leavers) who have made a complaint have increased in the last year: 37 in 2016–17 compared with nine in 2015–16. This increase reflects good use of advocacy to give children the confidence to say when things could be improved. The outcomes of complaints are being used to make things better for children. Complaints learning meetings, chaired by the complaints manager and attended by service managers, share learning, identify themes and result in an appropriate action plan.

35. Social workers see children regularly and alone. Direct work with children informs assessments and planning. Some life story work and later life letters are used to good effect to assist a child's understanding of their situation and plan, but these are variable in quality. In some cases, poor recording does not show direct work or reflect the social worker's relationship with the child. Children living with kinship carers do not routinely receive life story books or later life letters to help them to understand why they are not living with their parents. A life story tracker, which provides social workers with clear targets for completion, is now helping to improve practice.
36. The IROs are a dedicated team with manageable caseloads who are strong on scrutiny and clearly 'own' their children. They engage quickly with children and young people, following allocation, and see children or have contact with them between reviews. IROs keep up to date with children's changing needs, and there is effective challenge to progress on agreed actions and plans. In some cases, the IRO writes the review record to the young person as a letter, which is highly effective in reflecting their views and wishes.
37. The children in care health team, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), offers a comprehensive and well-managed service to children looked after and care leavers, which means that their health needs are very well met. All health assessments seen by inspectors were timely and provided good-quality, child-centred information written in a way that was easy for a young person to understand. Children looked after, including those placed out of Islington, have their health needs comprehensively met by active follow-up. Young people receive services promptly when substance misuse is identified.
38. Emotional health provision for children is effective. Managers have taken decisive action to improve the number of children who have an up-to-date strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). The recently introduced SDQ pathway helps social workers to understand and use the questionnaires to identify the emotional health needs of children. When a score indicates some concerns, emotional well-being meetings offer a reflective space to inform interventions and care planning, ensuring that children who would benefit from additional help are identified.



39. At the time of inspection, Islington was looking after 50 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Very high-quality social work and multi-agency support result in positive outcomes for these children. The impact of trauma explicitly informs the professional network approach to working with this group of young people and includes supporting foster carers, some of whom are former asylum seekers themselves. Particularly strong, sensitive work was seen in relation to forced marriage and bullying, resulting in high-level support for young people that ensures their safety.
40. Partnership working is an area of strength, and good multi-agency work makes a tangible difference to children's outcomes. The response to the risk of child sexual exploitation is good. Risk assessments are updated in response to changes in circumstances, and quick multi-agency action is taken to address any concerns identified. Effective direct work engages young people in their safety planning. Children missing from care benefit from effective multi-agency risk management and oversight by senior managers. Swift action is taken to safeguard young people through the use of secure accommodation when risks become unmanageable in the community, particularly in relation to gang activity. Workers make tenacious efforts to engage young people. Return home interviews are completed and most are clear on risks; they make links with other risk areas like child sexual exploitation, substance misuse and gang affiliation, and the analysis is shared with the professional network. This means that important information is gathered to help to inform planning to keep children safe.
41. The vast majority of children attend good or better schools. Those who do not, have additional visits by the school improvement team to ensure that they are not disadvantaged. The virtual school headteacher has clear attendance records for all children looked after, which are updated each day. The vast majority of children achieve an attendance of over 90%. At the time of the inspection, 20 children were struggling to maintain acceptable levels of attendance. All of them had an action plan that had good targets and appropriate strategies to help them to improve their attendance.
42. Most children in the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 achieve expected levels of attainment. However, attainment of young people at key stage 4 is lower than that of their peers. Thirteen children are not receiving a minimum of 25 hours of education each week. The virtual school provides online tutoring and support within 24 hours of their leaving education. Currently, this offer is between 12 and 15 hours per week. Child in Focus meetings discuss each of these children to ensure that actions are in place to get them back into a fuller programme of education.
43. PEPs are not good enough and do not involve all children sufficiently in the process. Most children do not have specific actions or timescales in their plans, which means that they do not know what they need to do to meet targets. Currently, the virtual school does not judge the impact of the use of

the pupil premium. This means that the local authority does not have a systematic way of measuring any resultant benefit for children.  
(Recommendation)

44. Fostering assessments are timely and of good quality and contain clear analysis and recommendations for learning in all cases seen by inspectors. Child-centred review assessments were seen, with good use of the fostering clinical psychologist to support carers through difficulties. The fostering panel has a robust quality assurance process and has not had to defer any cases due to poor-quality assessments in the past two years.
45. The fostering panel benefits from a highly experienced chair and committed membership, including a health partner and a care leaver. Panel minutes show relevant and insightful identification of areas for further exploration, and the panel offers clear advice and recommendations, both to the service and to the agency decision maker (ADM). Managers in the fostering service are responsive to feedback, and there is a clear feedback loop between the panel chair and the ADM, which drives improvements in practice for the benefit of children.
46. Recruitment of foster carers remains a challenge, despite significant recruitment activity undertaken by the local authority. A rolling programme of recruitment and a community development officer working with local schools, churches, mosques and nurseries have led to a number of applications. This is helping to ensure that children live in a diverse range of homes that are reflective of the local community. The local authority shares fostering resources with other north London authorities. This helps to ensure that children are placed near their communities, when this is appropriate. Careful matching takes place and options appraisals are completed. In relation to out-of-area placements, a specific hazards analysis identifies any local issues of concern, and there is a well-thought-out process that matches need with resource.
47. Foster carers are unanimous in their praise for the help, support, encouragement and feedback that they receive from their supervising social workers. They are clear about the decisions that they can make on behalf of the children and young people in their care. They praise the opportunities that children looked after have to participate in a range of leisure and social activities that help to promote children's physical and emotional health and social development.
48. Islington supports and encourages children's interests, and all children looked after are given free access to leisure facilities in the borough. If a child lives out of area, the equivalent access is sought in that area. In addition, the Chrysalis project, aimed at higher achievers, encourages children to expand their learning and to have high aspirations for their futures, by visiting theatres, museums and universities, alongside extra sessions offered by the virtual school.

49. Participation of children looked after is high, including disabled children, who benefit from a highly skilled specialist participation worker, and they are well represented by the Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) Council. Members of the CAIS Council attend the corporate parenting board and are influential in developing and improving services. Younger children have fewer opportunities to contribute, but the wide range of activities and work completed by CAIS is highly impressive, and feedback from young people is very positive.

**The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good.**

50. Adoption is considered for all children who may need permanent or alternative families. There has been an increase in the number of adoption orders in the last year, from eight in 2015–16 to 14 in 2016–17. This increase, combined with a growing number of special guardianship orders being granted, means that permanence is achieved for those children who need it.
51. Children receive an effective service from a well-established and experienced team of social workers, led by committed and knowledgeable managers. Social workers and managers know their children very well and robustly track all of those awaiting permanence. All children waiting have potential links with adopters. Information about children and prospective adopters is shared promptly across the north London adoption consortium and cross-London partnership. This, together with the good use of national links, helps to ensure that permanence is achieved quickly for children in Islington.
52. Family finders are tenacious and, as a result, the local authority has been successful in achieving adoption over the last year for brothers and sisters together, disabled children and children from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds. Some older children have also been adopted by their long-term foster carers, which is a very good outcome for them, although this has had a negative impact on the local authority's overall performance in relation to the timeliness of adoption. Setting aside this small cohort of children with exceptional circumstances, the vast majority of children move to live with their adopters well within national timescales.
53. Parallel planning routinely takes place to minimise delay. However, some children potentially miss out on the opportunity for very early permanence during court proceedings, as there are currently no adopters in Islington approved to foster to adopt, and such foster carers from external agencies are not always available. Managers are aware of this and are taking appropriate action to increase options.
54. Assessments of potential adopters are thorough. They are undertaken in a timely way and in line with national requirements. Social workers explore all

relevant areas, making good use of research. Detailed reports enable the adoption panel and the ADM to make informed recommendations and decisions about approval. Adopters from a wide range of backgrounds are approved, reflecting the diverse ethnic communities in Islington.

55. The vast majority of child permanence reports are of a good quality. They provide a clear understanding of the child's lived experiences and their specific needs in relation to their age, health, development, any disability and their identity. Matching reports are also of a high standard, demonstrating the tenacious efforts of social workers to find the right match for children. There have been no adoption disruptions in the past two years, either before or after the making of an adoption order, highlighting the effectiveness of the matching processes and support services.
56. An appropriately experienced individual chairs the adoption panel and provides strong leadership to an established team of panel members, who have a range of experience and skills. Panel and ADM minutes demonstrate scrutiny and appropriate challenge when considering approvals and matches. Quality assurance systems and feedback are robust. The chair also produces good-quality six-monthly and annual reports on panel activity. She provides feedback to social workers in every case considered and seeks feedback from prospective adopters. Senior managers know the service very well and are committed to continually improving the quality of the service.
57. Adoption support is a strength. Adopters speak extremely positively about the support that they receive from their social workers throughout their adoption journey. They report feeling very well prepared for becoming adoptive parents. Having the opportunity to meet with the medical adviser to discuss potential lifelong or future needs of their child or children is greatly valued. A particular strength identified by adopters was the additional expert therapeutic support that they received from a psychologist prior to, during and following their child's transition into their family. This enables children who have complex attachment difficulties to move successfully and to settle quickly.
58. Children benefit from meaningful contact with those important to them. Assessments focus on what is right for the child following their adoption. A dedicated contact worker facilitates and supports both direct and letterbox contact. Consequently, children benefit from maintaining relationships, when appropriate, and receiving letters that will add value to their lives in terms of their identity.
59. Social workers undertake some excellent work with children in preparation for adoption, using a range of tools to assist with their understanding of what is happening. All children receive life story books, but the quality of these is variable, and a significant minority lack important information. Some later life letters written for children use too much social work jargon, making them harder for children to understand. Managers have recognised that these are areas for improvement, and work is in progress to address them.

60. Post-adoption support is very good. Children and their adopters have access to an impressive and wide range of post-adoption support. This includes training opportunities, access to workshops, counselling, therapy, support groups for children, teens and adults and signposting to other voluntary sector support services. Once approved, adopters receive a comprehensive support handbook and then receive quarterly newsletters, highlighting pertinent issues, training and support opportunities. Very good use is also made of the adoption support fund, ensuring that families receive the specialist support that they need.
61. Birth parents have access to positive counselling and support. Additionally, the Pause team carries out highly effective work with women who have had children removed as a result of legal proceedings. The team is currently working with 18 women who have had 80 children placed in local authority care. The multi-disciplinary team has passionate and committed staff, who are clear about their roles and know when they need to make a safeguarding referral. There is a high level of engagement, and powerful, early impact for children is evident, particularly in relation to the quality of relationships and adoption processes. Sustaining change following the end of Pause involvement is the next challenge, and the team is engaged with a national charity that is leading on this longitudinal research.

**The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is good.**

### **Inspection findings**

62. Over the past year, the local authority has improved the quality of service for care leavers. Managers are clear about the actions necessary to improve the service further. They have a clear understanding of the young people's needs and ensure that the service offers complete wrap-around provision to meet their social, emotional, health and accommodation needs.
63. Young persons' advisers and social workers work effectively together in Independent Futures, Islington's care leavers' service, and they are in contact with nearly all of their care leavers. They know their care leavers well. Workers can clearly articulate care leavers' support needs and the provision available to meet these needs. These care leavers include those who have higher support needs, such as those at risk of sexual exploitation, those in custody, those involved in gangs as both victim and perpetrator and those who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Care leavers report that they know how to contact their workers, and the vast majority feel appropriately supported. One care leaver stated that he was made to feel that he 'belonged in this country' and that he 'belonged in Islington' by his adviser.

64. Young persons' advisers and social workers work well with other professionals for the benefit of care leavers. This includes positive relationships with the youth offending service, probation, CAMHS, the Department for Work and Pensions, the police and the prison service. Targeted support is offered to help care leavers to progress into independent living. For example, young persons' advisers ensure that prisons receive pathway and other plans to ensure that care leavers receive the support that they need while in custody.
65. The vast majority of pathway plans are up to date. However, these plans vary too much in quality, and many have insufficient involvement of care leavers. Many targets identified in plans do not explain to care leavers how they can be achieved. Care leavers in many cases do not feel that they are set challenging and worthwhile targets by their advisers and they are therefore insufficiently motivated to complete the actions. Recent actions taken by managers, combined with training undertaken by IROs, show an increased focus on the quality of pathway planning. The impact in terms of care leavers' engagement with the pathway planning process is not yet sufficiently evident. (Recommendation)
66. High numbers of care leavers are in further and higher education and achieve well. Currently, 41 care leavers are undertaking degree courses and 140 care leavers are undertaking further education courses at various levels. These care leavers receive good support, both from their young persons' advisers and from appropriate financial provision while they are on their courses. Nineteen young people are undertaking apprenticeships to enable them to gain valuable skills while working. The local authority has developed plans to expand its apprenticeship programme next year so that more care leavers can benefit from such provision. A care leaver stated that she would not have been where she is now without the support and guidance of her young persons' adviser. An adviser explained how proud she was when she attended a graduation ceremony of one of her care leavers.
67. Over a third of care leavers are NEET. However, staff do have clear and precise plans in place to support them into worthwhile activity. Specialist workers offer tailored, specific provision, and care leavers report that they receive good support to find work. Managers discuss each young person who is NEET at quarterly education review meetings to check that plans are in place and appropriate, so that their young people can progress.
68. Care leavers have very good access to health facilities. A children's looked after health adviser facilitates a weekly drop-in at Independent Futures, to support care leavers' sexual, general and emotional health, in addition to providing specialist substance misuse support. Care leavers welcome this and the service is well used. Regular liaison between CAMHS and adult mental health services ensures continuity of provision for those care leavers who have specific emotional health needs. Health advisers refer care leavers to specialists as necessary. Young persons' advisers often take care leavers to

these appointments to give them moral support and to facilitate their attendance.

69. Care leavers receive health passports when they leave the service. This ensures that they are aware of their medical histories and of any allergies or medical concerns, and that they have contact details of medical and dental practitioners. They also receive a list of local specialist health provision, which is individualised to the locality in which they live. All care leavers who spoke to inspectors are aware of their health issues and needs and know whom to contact if they have any problems.
70. Staff at Independent Futures support care leavers well to find appropriate accommodation. There is a clear accommodation pathway with a good range of options available to care leavers. An effective accommodation panel ensures clear tracking of care leavers' needs. Young persons' advisers place care leavers in the most appropriate provision for them at the time, based on a careful assessment of their needs. Care leavers report feeling safe in their homes and know that their young person's adviser will support them with any difficulties that they may have.
71. Young persons' advisers support them to move to independent accommodation when they are ready. There are clear and robust plans for care leavers in temporary accommodation, and these are reviewed frequently by managers to ensure that they have effective moving-on plans in place. No care leavers have been evicted from their permanent tenancy since September 2015, which is reflective of the substantive levels of tenancy support and good preparation activities to ensure that they have the skills necessary to maintain a tenancy. Managers have a clear focus on sustaining staying-put placements for care leavers with foster carers, beyond the age of 18. At the time of the inspection, there were 42 care leavers in such arrangements. This enables continuity of provision for care leavers and ensures that they are not placed in more independent accommodation before they are ready to proceed with such a transition.
72. Independent Futures provides additional and relevant activities for care leavers throughout the year. Groups have visited companies, job fairs and universities to expand their knowledge of job and training opportunities. Driving lessons are available to care leavers who complete their independent skills passports. Care leavers have access to 'Grand-mentors'; these are older professional people, who give enduring emotional and practical support.
73. Independent Futures, alongside partner organisations, provides a two-day independence programme. This course supports care leavers into independence and covers housing, relationships, sexual health and education, employment and training. Care leavers reported to inspectors that they feel that they receive good support from their young persons' advisers to become independent; this includes help with cooking, completing forms, financial benefits, conflict management and practical help with moving house.

74. Sixty care leavers are also young parents, and young persons' advisers ensure that they have access to many activities, specifically provided for them, including soft play dates, children's centre facilities, Inspire (a group for new mums) and the support of the family nurse partnership service. One young mother said that these activities stopped her from feeling isolated and that she has made many good friends through these activities and groups.
75. Staff and elected members in Islington are proud of their care leavers and recognise their achievements by holding an annual celebratory event. A steering group of staff and care leavers plans this event each year. Care leavers report that this event boosts their confidence, gives them real pride in their achievements and helps them to move forward.
76. The care leavers' service is proactive in seeking the views of care leavers. This is achieved through the use of regular surveys and information informally gathered. This is used to help to inform service improvement, with the views of care leavers reflected in the service development plan.
77. Care leavers are aware of their rights and entitlements and know how to obtain support to access them. Each care leaver receives a book explaining what they can expect from Independent Futures and their financial entitlements. Their young person's adviser ensures that they discuss these rights, which helps care leavers to access appropriate financial support at the right time for them.



<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Senior leaders, operational managers and elected members are ambitious, aspirational and determined to provide outstanding services for all children and families in Islington. Effective use of political influence to engage key partner agencies at the highest level reflects the strong and committed partnership contribution to good local services.</p> <p>Strategic partners demonstrate effective engagement through aligned key priorities that fully reflect the diverse needs of local people. Established and mature governance arrangements support the Islington Safeguarding Children Board to know and improve the quality of multi-agency frontline practice that leads to effective integrated services to children and families. This includes successful coordination of work to effectively identify and support children at risk of sexual exploitation, gang affiliation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation.</p> <p>The highly effective use of available resources ensures delivery of services consistent with local needs and priorities. Good joint commissioning arrangements, informed by a robust assessment of local needs, result in services that are reflective of, and sensitive to, the diverse culture, religion and ethnicity of families in Islington. Leaders and managers fully understand the value and impact of early preventative services, and this is reflected in the wide range of high-quality provision available to children and families at a local level.</p> <p>Elected members, leaders and operational managers are excellent corporate parents. They are proactive, highly ambitious and aspirational for children looked after and care leavers, and take real pride in their achievements, celebrating with them as any good parent would.</p> <p>Senior managers know the quality of frontline practice, informed by extensive and comprehensive performance management information and enhanced by regularly shadowing workers, observing practice and involving young people in a meaningful way. Decisions, taken with the right level of confidence and authority, ensure that children receive the right level of service when they most need it.</p> <p>The local authority uses creative approaches to recruit and retain staff, and this is leading to improved stability in the workforce. Social workers have manageable caseloads with good supervision and support and extensive training. This helps to improve their capacity and their resilience in undertaking effective direct work with children and families, many of whom have highly complex needs.</p> <p>The local authority has successfully developed an environment where social work can flourish; children are safer as a result and enabled to achieve their best.</p>	

## Inspection findings

78. Senior leaders, managers and politicians are highly effective, ambitious and passionate about improving outcomes for children and young people, and aim to provide outstanding services. They are aspirational and effective advocates for all children in Islington, and the quality of services and practice improves as a result. This is in the context of high levels of deprivation, substance misuse and knife-related crime. Many children in need of help and protection, children looked after, including care leavers, and those adopted in the borough have highly complex needs and present considerable challenges. Work completed since the inspection in 2012 has strengthened the quality of practice and has ensured that children remain protected. There are very many examples of highly effective practice that provide children and young people with the support that they need to be safe and do well.
79. The chief executive is tenacious about the local authority's ambition to provide excellent services to local people. Her commitment to continuous improvement has been instrumental in establishing innovation and creativity to improve the lives of children. For example, the pledge to tackle youth violence has led to the highly effective and integrated partnership arrangements to address the prevalent gang and drug culture in the area.
80. The leader of the council, the lead member for children's services and elected members are clearly committed to improving services for all children and families in Islington. They meet regularly with children and demonstrate a good understanding of the challenges that they face. Effective use of political influence to engage key partner agencies at the highest level reflects the strong and committed partnership contribution to good local services. Strategic partner representatives demonstrate effective engagement through aligned priorities that reflect and meet the needs of local people.
81. Routine safeguarding assurance meetings with the corporate DCS fully inform the chief executive and elected members of the quality of frontline practice. This results in a strong corporate understanding of safeguarding and the good quality of social work practice. Effective elected member scrutiny of performance information has led to specific and targeted focus on key areas of risk, for example the multi-agency understanding of the approach to the supply of drugs across local authorities, known as the 'county lines' model. Proactive and persuasive work by the lead member for children's services with elected members has resulted in a corporate understanding and prioritisation of services to vulnerable children, including retention of services that provide effective early help for families.
82. Creative use of available resources increases capacity to provide and extend services across the borough, leading to accessible support at a local level. This includes effective investment in services for children on the edge of care, which has enabled some children to remain living safely with their families.

83. Leaders and managers fully understand the value and impact of early preventative services, reflected in the wide range of good-quality provision available to children and families. A recent example is the investment in research to understand the trauma that children experience living in households in which there is domestic abuse, to improve social workers' confidence and to develop diverse approaches to best help and support them.
84. The highly motivated and effective strategic partnership demonstrates ambition to provide high-quality services in Islington. Established and mature governance arrangements, including effective collaboration with the clinical commissioning group, support the LSCB to know and improve the quality of multi-agency frontline practice. This leads to successful arrangements that provide effective integrated services to children and families. An example of this is the strategic response to strengthening organisational governance arrangements following the inspection of the youth offending service in 2016. As a result, effective joint working and the co-location of a number of services have considerably strengthened the area's response to public protection, including the multi-agency response to youth violence and children at risk of sexual exploitation.
85. Partnership work with voluntary agencies is inclusive and empowering. Strong and effective collaboration with voluntary sector organisations results in the delivery of high-quality, locally accessible services at universal, targeted and specialist levels. These are making a difference, for example, with mentors who are engaging effectively with young people affiliated with gangs.
86. The agency coordination of work with children at risk of sexual exploitation, gang affiliation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation is highly effective. The innovative 'specialist intervention pilot', resulting from a successful bid to the Department for Education innovation fund to tackle serious youth violence, supports two specialist workers who provide exceptional direct intervention to those most vulnerable children assessed as at high risk of harm from gang-related activity or child sexual exploitation. In addition, their expertise through consultation effectively supports social workers to improve the identification of risk and a reduction of harmful behaviour, including, for some, the disengagement from gang-related activity.
87. Work with the police to identify and broker cross-authority police cooperation for children placed in the borough by other local authorities is effective. A detailed analysis of this group identifies those most at risk, and contact is made with the placing local authority. In one case, this resulted in a robust challenge to the placing local authority about the effectiveness and safety of the care planning for a highly vulnerable child; this led to immediate protective action.
88. Effective action to raise awareness of parents in primary schools and of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils, in conjunction with the healthy schools coordinator, is leading to early identification of the possible risks of female genital mutilation.

Specific training delivered to a range of professionals, parents and pupils is leading to greater understanding of the indicators of risk and the protection of children.

89. Established and effective joint commissioning arrangements, informed by a robust assessment of local needs, reflect detailed knowledge of the local population. As a result, services are reflective of, and sensitive to, the diverse culture, religion and ethnicity of families in Islington. For example, parenting programmes developed to address and challenge specific cultural norms, and in the first language of families, enable accessible support that improves the experience of and help to children from specific minority ethnic groups. Children are involved in a range of commissioning processes, and their views inform service specification and procurement. Recently, young carers contributed to the re-procurement of services, directly participating in the redesign of support to them and their families.
90. The quality of corporate parenting is excellent. Elected members, leaders and managers are proactive, highly ambitious and aspirational for children looked after and care leavers. They take real pride in their achievements, and celebrate with them as any good parent would. The chief executive is an inspirational mentor for at least three young people and she has been instrumental in influencing and improving their life chances.
91. The CAIS enables the In Care Council to be a highly influential advocate for children looked after and care leavers as members of the corporate parenting board. The service widely consults children, including those who live outside the borough, about their experiences of care. These views inform services, which have improved as a result of their ideas and input, such as improvements to holiday arrangements with foster carers. Children looked after and care leavers who live outside the borough, provided with travel costs and overnight accommodation, were able to attend the annual evening celebrations of achievements held at the Arsenal Emirates Stadium in 2015 and 2016.
92. The local authority knows the quality of frontline practice, informed by extensive and comprehensive performance management information. The electronic 'intelligence hub' brings together over 60 sources of data, providing team managers and social workers with accessible information on key performance areas of practice, which includes data on individual children, families, households and the wider community. This results, for example, in effective identification and profiling of geographical 'hotspots' where young people involved with, affiliated to and at the fringes of gang activity live and congregate. This leads to effective targeted interventions to those most at risk and early identification of those potentially at risk.
93. Senior managers have a comprehensive knowledge of their strengths and areas for improvement, well informed by shadowing workers, observing practice and involving young people in a meaningful way. At all levels,

decisions taken by managers ensure that children receive the right level of service at the right time. Team managers and social workers know the children well, and good management oversight of practice at an operational level is helping to improve the quality of social work practice.

94. A wide range of effective quality assurance activity includes thorough audits arising from scrutiny of performance management information. This contributes to the local authority's well-informed understanding of areas that require improvement. The recently introduced 'practice week', involving senior leaders, enabled parents, carers, children and professionals to provide feedback to inform a clear and comprehensive action plan that focuses on improving their experience of help and support. Learning from SCRs leads to effective changes and improvements in multi-agency practice. As a result of the SCR on Child E, improved coordination between occupational therapists and housing support workers led to comprehensive assessment and actions that improve the safety of children who 'live at height' in accommodation across Islington.
95. The local authority has successfully completed the first phase of its social work model, 'doing what counts and measuring what matters', a motivational social work approach. Implemented in the children in need service, this improves the quality of relationships between social workers and children, and this was evident during the inspection. This model will be extended across the whole service, to strengthen practice for all vulnerable children.
96. The local authority has effective relationships with Cafcass, which is highly complimentary of the authority regarding the quality and timeliness of pre-proceedings and care proceedings work. Social workers produce good evidence, which negates the need for further independent assessments, resulting in timely completion of care proceedings, the vast majority of which are completed within 26 weeks.
97. The local authority is creative about how to recruit and retain staff, and this is leading to improved stability in the workforce. Recent recruitment of social workers tests the core attributes underpinning the motivational social work approach through role play, and identifies the applicant's ability to build positive relationships and to demonstrate empathy and collaboration skills. This approach, also applied to locum workers, demonstrates good practice. This has resulted in 24 agency workers becoming permanent members of staff, providing continuity of workers for children, and, together with strengthened managerial oversight, this is improving the consistency of social work practice. Key worker housing provided by the local authority is attracting professionals and has enabled 22 social workers to live and work in Islington.
98. Young people are fully involved in the recruitment to all social work and manager, including senior manager, posts and they take part in the induction of new staff. They have developed and deliver the 'listening and connect'

module of training, to describe their experiences to new staff and foster carers. The training powerfully conveys what matters to them.

99. Social workers spoken to on this inspection have manageable caseloads that improve their capacity to undertake effective direct work with children. An established culture of learning and continuous professional development results in a good level of support, supervision and training to workers, with specialist workers and consultants available to help them to improve their practice and build resilience. The local authority has developed an environment where social work can flourish, and as a result, children seen on this inspection are safer and enabled to achieve their best.

## The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

**The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good**

### Executive summary

The LSCB is ambitious. It has a clear sense of vision and purpose and is well led, well managed and well run. Partnerships, particularly with health, are well developed and effective. Governance arrangements are robust. The board makes a significant contribution to the development of services at both a strategic and an operational level. The board fulfils all of its statutory functions, including those relating to private fostering and allegations against people who work with children. Early help, thresholds for access to children's social care services, children looked after and care leavers are very much in scope and constantly under review.

The LSCB and its partners have a strong understanding of child sexual exploitation. They have taken decisive and effective action to strengthen the local response to children who go missing from home or care.

The board makes good use of single and multi-agency audits to identify and address any shortfalls in practice and performance. Its management of, and response to, SCRs and local management reviews are robust and effective. Plans are in place to ensure that the section 11 audits, which partners are currently in the process of updating, are subject to rigorous critical challenge and scrutiny.

The board uses performance management information from a number of different sources to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of frontline safeguarding and child protection practice. However, the board's child protection performance report lacks sufficient commentary or analysis and currently does not include any health or police data.

The board's website provides easy access to a comprehensive range of high-quality policies, procedures and practice guidelines, which are regularly updated. The training provided by the board is of a consistently high quality.

The board's business plan is detailed and comprehensive, but it is not being used to best effect to monitor the activities and track the progress of the board's various sub-groups. Although easy to read, the last annual report was also overly descriptive. It did not provide a clear evaluation of the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and protect children and young people in Islington.

Children, young people and families are not yet sufficiently involved, either directly or indirectly, in the work of the board.

## Recommendations

100. Ensure that the board has access to the right level of performance management information and data with which to monitor the impact and effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding and child protection practice.
101. Ensure that the business plan is used effectively to monitor the work and track the progress of the various sub-groups in a way that makes their activities more visible to board members.
102. Ensure that the annual report provides a clear assessment of the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and protect children and young people.
103. Ensure that the work of the board is better informed and influenced by the lived experiences of children, young people and families.

## Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

104. With a clear sense of purpose and direction, an impressive independent chair, a tenacious business manager and good engagement from partner agencies, the board is making steady progress to achieve its overarching objectives. Meetings are well structured. Decisions taken and actions agreed are clearly recorded and routinely followed up. Meeting minutes provide clear evidence of effective challenge between board members and partner agencies and, when applicable, the LSCB and external bodies. While the board's commitment to continuous improvement is very evident, there are unresolved issues regarding financial contributions by some partner agencies.
105. Robust governance arrangements ensure an appropriate level of accountability, while at the same time making it possible for the LSCB to hold other strategic boards to account. The independent chair of the LSCB meets at quarterly intervals with the chief executive of the local authority, the leader of the council, the lead member and the DCS. A written protocol clearly defines the relationship and reporting arrangements between the LSCB, the Health and Well-being Board, the Safer Islington Partnership, the Children and Families Partnership Board and the Adult Safeguarding Board. This means that the board is not operating in a vacuum and is able to exert its strategic influence.
106. The board continues to make a significant contribution to the development of services at both a strategic and an operational level. For example, working collaboratively with the Youth Justice Management Board, the board has helped to revolutionise the local response to gangs and youth violence. Currently, the board is actively involved in the ongoing transformation of early help services. The board uses its influence effectively to ensure that safeguarding issues are prioritised appropriately.



107. The LSCB provides effective critical challenge. Within the last 12 months, the board has, for example, challenged schools about their contribution to core groups and child protection conferences, children's social care about the offer and completion of return home interviews and the local authority about its response to the 'Prevent' duty. During the same period, the board has reviewed the work of the designated officer to assure itself that allegations against people working with children are dealt with appropriately, received updated reports on early help and children looked after and redoubled its efforts to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements. The board is able to demonstrate its impact on raising practice standards and improving outcomes for children, young people and families.
108. The board does not yet have its own performance dashboard. Although the LSCB is using performance management information from a range of different sources to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of frontline practice, the commentary in its bi-monthly child protection performance information report is insufficient and lacks detailed analysis. The LSCB is aware of this shortfall and has plans to address it, but in the short term, the board does not have a direct line of sight on, for example, the number of young people who present at accident and emergency units as a result of self-harm, substance misuse or peer/gang violence or the number of cases that are stepped up or down between early help and children's social care. (Recommendation)
109. The LSCB takes quality assurance very seriously. Since June 2016, the board has audited children's participation in child protection conferences, the operational response to female genital mutilation, the use by the police of their powers of protection, repeat child protection plans, the level of consideration being given to disability and/or children's voices in child protection medicals and knife-related harm. Any remedial action required is clearly recorded in the form of simple, but specific and measurable, audit action plans. By identifying and systematically addressing shortfalls in practice and/or performance, the board is making a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families.
110. Annual safeguarding self-assessment reports completed by schools and providers of early years services are rigorously analysed by the board to identify areas for improvement and to evaluate the impact of multi-agency safeguarding training. These reports have been used very successfully to consider referral patterns, explore partners' understanding and application of the threshold criteria for access to children's social care and assess their awareness of, and responses to, the lessons learned from SCRs. When necessary, appropriate follow-up action is taken. For example, designated safeguarding leads have visited those schools that did not have an effective 'missing policy' and organised refresher training on the use of the neglect toolkit for early years providers.

111. Partner agencies are currently in the process of updating their section 11 audits. The LSCB business manager recognises the need, and has plans, to ensure that section 11 audits are subject to robust scrutiny and rigorous critical challenge.
112. Although the number of sudden or unexpected deaths involving children or young people in Islington is relatively small, the child death overview panel (CDOP) ensures that each case is carefully reviewed. Whenever the causes of death are judged to have been preventable, the CDOP works hard to ensure that lessons are learned and appropriate action is taken. For example, an increased focus on knife crime and knife-related homicides is resulting in increased awareness of such incidents by partner agencies.
113. The LSCB has significantly strengthened its approach to SCRs by, for example, ensuring that the referral pathways are clear and unambiguous and that the decision-making process is rigorous and robust. Lessons learned from SCRs and local management reviews (LMRs) are widely disseminated, and the SCR sub-group is persistent and effective in holding partner agencies to account for implementing their SCR and LMR action plans. Following the death of Child E, well-coordinated action involving housing officers and occupational therapists led to a marked reduction in the number of disabled children whose families were on the housing waiting list. Senior managers have also taken appropriate action to improve the communication between Cafcass, IROs and children's social care services in response to the lessons learned from the SCR regarding Child F.
114. Through its website, the board ensures that partners and practitioners are able to access high-quality policies, procedures and practice guidelines, which are regularly updated. For example, the LSCB has reviewed and updated its policies and procedures to reflect the latest developments in relation to child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty. This means that those engaged in safeguarding and protecting children and young people have the policies and procedural tools that they need to do the job.
115. The LSCB and its partners have a thorough understanding of child sexual exploitation. They are making good use of data and intelligence to develop a coherent local profile of the risks associated with child sexual exploitation. The child sexual exploitation, missing and trafficking coordinator is visible, active and influential and ensures that the potential links between child sexual exploitation and other vulnerabilities are recognised and explored. Year-on-year, the number of children and young people who are identified as having been, or are at risk of being, sexually exploited has increased. The LSCB is able to evidence its impact on managing and reducing risks while, at the same time, disrupting the activities of perpetrators.
116. The LSCB has been influential in strengthening the response to children who go missing from home or care. A comprehensive missing and child sexual exploitation action plan, which is regularly reviewed and periodically updated,

provides clear evidence of progress and impact. Senior managers and leaders now have a much clearer line of sight on the offer and completion of return home interviews. Although there is still some way to go, children and young people are being better safeguarded and protected.

117. The training provided by the LSCB is of a consistently high quality. Directly linked to the pan-London Competence Still Matters framework, the training delivered by the board is being used very effectively to promote multi-agency working. In the last 12 months, over 1,100 staff have completed training provided by the LSCB. Online feedback is generally very positive. Members of the training and development sub-group recognise that they need to do more to evaluate the impact of training on practice and performance. However, annual safeguarding reports have demonstrated that the use of chronologies to record issues and concerns relating to individual children, particularly in schools and early years settings, has increased as a result of the training provided.
118. While priorities in the annual report are clear and explicit, the business plan is only updated once a year. This means that it is not being used to best effect to monitor and track the progress of priorities or to evaluate the work being undertaken in the various sub-groups. (Recommendation)
119. Although the annual report is reasonably comprehensive and easy to read and provides a coherent overview of the work of the LSCB and its sub-groups, it is overly descriptive. By concentrating more on the role and function of sub-groups, the focus of audit activity and the content of the multi-agency training, the annual report does not provide a clear and unequivocal assessment of the impact and effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and protect children and young people in Islington. (Recommendation)
120. While partner agencies are able to demonstrate their individual efforts to reach out to and engage children and young people, the LSCB recognises that it needs to do more to strengthen the voice and influence of children, young people and families in the work of the board. Holding a recent board meeting at a local primary school, and hearing directly from the children about the things that worry them, are steps in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go. (Recommendation)

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

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