

Report of: Corporate Director, People Directorate

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	3 November 2020	All
Delete as appropriate		Non-exempt

SUBJECT: Child Protection Annual Report 2020

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Committee on the progress being made in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Islington's most vulnerable children.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee scrutinise the headline performance outcomes;
- 2.2 That the Committee scrutinise the governance arrangements for safeguarding children;
- 2.3 That the Committee scrutinise the findings of quality assurance activities.

3. Background

- 3.1 The welfare of Islington's vulnerable children is rightly one of the Council's highest priorities. As of August 2020, Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service (SFSS) is currently working with 900 children in need, 377 children who are looked after, of which 26 are disabled children and 62 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), 538 care leavers and 180 children with child protection plans. The majority of child protection plans are due to emotional abuse or neglect. Characteristics of parents whose children have child protection plans include domestic violence and abuse (47%), adult mental health (36%) and adult alcohol or substance misuse (26%). 8 children were living in a Private Fostering arrangement at some point during the year 2019/20. Islington's Youth and Community Service is currently working with 51 Youth Offending interventions. This includes three custodial interventions, four remand interventions and 44 community interventions.

- 3.2 In 2020 Islington had 1 full inspection. The inspectors considered the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers. This was in accordance with the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). The inspection concluded Islington's overall effectiveness as Outstanding and that:

"Children in Islington benefit from services that have gone from strength to strength since the last inspection in 2017, when they were judged good overall, and outstanding for leadership, management and governance. Senior leaders and members of the council demonstrate an unwavering commitment to improving and enriching the lives of children and their families. This is evidenced by the significant and sustained investment in children's services, and by the wide range of highly successful initiatives that are having a positive impact on children and their families, whatever their level of need. Highly skilled and experienced staff listen carefully to children to understand their needs and ensure that plans are effective.

Senior leaders promote a strong culture of learning and development and have built on the findings of the focused visit and the joint targeted area inspection in 2018. Partnership working is strong and well established and has contributed to the development and successful implementation of many creative and innovative services. Senior managers have an accurate picture of the quality of practice and services delivered in Islington and the improvements that are still required, through highly effective performance information and quality assurance systems. Staff receive high-quality support and take great pride in their work."

- 3.3 Our routine Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted was held on 30th January 2020. This annual conversation is used to jointly identify areas for further scrutiny / inspection and is informed by the annual self-evaluation which has to be sent to Ofsted in advance of the meeting. This was a very positive meeting with no areas of concern or challenge identified. It is envisaged that we will have no further Ofsted inspection activity now in Children's Social Care until at least early in the New Year which is likely to be for a focused visit.
- 3.4 We are awaiting our Youth Offending Service and Special Educational Needs and Disability inspections.

4. Governance Arrangements

- 4.1 The governance and scrutiny of the arrangements for safeguarding children take place through this Committee and the following inter-agency fora:
- 4.2 **Safeguarding Accountability Meetings** chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, Corporate Director of People, Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board and the Director of Safeguarding. The meeting is held eight weekly and allows senior members to hold senior officers and the chair of the Safeguarding Board to account, to scrutinise performance related to vulnerable children, to be appraised of any concerns about the safety and welfare of children and to drive improvement.
- 4.3 **Corporate Parenting Board**, co-chaired by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families and the In Care Council (Children Looked After and Care Leavers) and attended by four elected members and senior officers in the partnership as well as across the partnership. The Board meets eight weekly and scrutinises performance and strategic planning related to children in care and care leavers, sets direction and drives improvement.

- 4.4 **Islington Safeguarding Children Board (ISCB)** is chaired by an independent chair, the Board meets four times a year under the new arrangements. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 has removed the requirement for Local Authorities to establish LSCBs and replaced this with new local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Under the new legislation, the three statutory safeguarding partners - Local Authority, Police and Clinical Commissioning Group - must make arrangements to work together, along with the relevant agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area.
- 4.5 Since the full implementation of new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in September 2019, the ISCB continues to carry out all of its existing statutory functions including both Serious Case Reviews and Child Death Reviews.
- 4.6 The Board has sub-committees Quality Assurance, Training, Missing and Exploitation, Case Review, the Education Sub Group and more recently the Early Help Sub Group. The ISCB agrees local priorities and monitors actions taken to implement them. The Case Review Sub Group across the local priorities and monitors actions taken to implement them. The Case Review Sub Group across the partnership agreed to undertake 3 case reviews during the year.
- 4.7 The ISCB annual report evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding and child protection in Islington and has set the following priorities, to improve the collective effectiveness of agencies in:
- Addressing the impact of neglect on children, including by helping them to become more resilient.
 - Addressing the consequences / harm suffered as a result of domestic violence, parental mental health and substance abuse.
 - Identification of children who are vulnerable to exploitation and holding perpetrators to account.
- 4.8 The Annual Report of the ISCB will be presented to the Committee in February 2021

5. Islington's Motivational Practice Model and Partners in Practice Work

- 5.1 The DfE granted nearly £5m to children's social care in three Phases to transform services to improve outcomes for children and their families. Phase 1 involved building a practice model- "Motivational Social Work" and Phase 2 altered the Practice Model to enhance it and include Trauma Informed Practice. It also involved expanding the reach to include children who receive an early help service, children who are known to the Criminal Justice System, gang affiliated or at risk of criminal exploitation and Looked After Children- "Motivational Practice Model". Phase 3 now involves working with other Local Authorities to improve their practice and outcomes for their children- Partners In Practice.
- 5.2 The practice model is relationship based and feedback from children, families, staff, services and Ofsted has been very positive; "A stable workforce and manageable caseloads enable social workers to develop positive and enduring relationships with children. The local authority's preferred social work model is well embedded, and workers demonstrate a good understanding of the impact of trauma on children's lives. Practitioners build effective relationships with parents and provide appropriate challenge." This Practice Model has demonstrated impact on our data for example the reduction in re-referral rates to Children's Social Care. Islington is now undertaking Partners in Practice work with 3 Local Authorities.

6. Performance Management and Quality Assurance

6.1. In order to ensure that Islington's most vulnerable children are safe and that our services continuously improve, a range of quality assurance measures are employed to continually test the quality of our service provision and to learn lessons about how to improve.

6.2 Through performance management we are able to use key performance indicators as a 'proxy' measure for quality of service and to support service improvement. Caution needs to be exercised in relying on performance indicators in isolation as it is possible to have good performance but poor quality of service; although conversely it is unlikely that there could be good quality of service and poor performance. Therefore, to ensure that there is a comprehensive understanding of the quality of service both quantitative and qualitative information must be reviewed.

6.3 The data tells us that:

- We received 11,677 contacts requesting a service for children in 2019/20, an increase from 2018/19, but in line with the number in 2017/18. However, this includes the contacts for the new Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Central Point of Access, which started halfway during the year. Excluding these contacts, the number of contacts were in line with the 2018/19 total and down on 2017/18.
- The most common source of contacts is the police (29%), followed by schools (14%)
- The most common reasons for contacts were domestic violence (15.4%), child mental health (15.1% - including 5.6% for the Central Point of Access), parenting capacity (10%) and physical abuse (5%).
- 3,680 (32%) went on to receive an early help service and 2,269 (19%) went onto receive a social care service.
- We had the 18th highest rate of assessed Children in Need in the country in 2018/19.
- We had a slightly higher rate of children with child protection plans per 10,000 compared to our statistical neighbours (SN) in 2018/19 (44 per 10,000 for Islington, 39 per 10,000 for our SN)
- We have carried out a much higher rate of child protection enquiries than statistical neighbours- see paragraph 6.13
- We had a higher proportion of repeat child protection plans compared to our SN in 2018/19 (21% compared to 19%), however in 2019/20 this fell to 18%
- Children do not have child protection plans for lengthy periods of time, this means that the harm they suffered is resolved as quickly as it can be - over 50% ended within nine months in 2019/20;
- We applied to court for orders to protect children more than most other boroughs, we had the 10th highest nationally in 2017/18. However, the Islington rate dropped in 2018/19 and we only had the 49th highest rate nationally.
- Islington has more children looked after per 10,000 than SN, although the gap narrowed in 2018/19
- The proportion of Looked After children who had to move more than three times during a year is slightly higher than our SN (11.8% compared to 9.4% in 2018/19)
- 77 children in our care moved 2 or more times in 2019/20. Children and young people with the most complex needs (are more likely to be older when they come into our care, have an Education, Health & Care Plan, known to be physically violent or those who have experienced complex trauma in their parents' care) are likely to have the most moves.
- Fewer children 16+ are becoming looked after (from 72 in 2015/16 to 68 in 2018/19), and fewer 11 -15 year olds (from 61 in 2015/16 to 41 in 2018/19) were becoming looked after than was the case 4 years ago (2015/16). However, there was an increase in the number of children becoming looked after aged 16+ in 2019/20 (81), but a fall in the number aged 10-15 (77).

- 13% of young people are remaining with their foster carers after their 18th birthday and 36% move to semi-independent accommodation, as at August 2020.
- Placements for children looked after are becoming much more difficult to find, there is a national shortage of foster homes and significant challenges of supply within the children's homes sector
- 70 children were placed more than 20 miles away at the end of 2019/20 (19%)
- The same number of children in 2019/20 were subject to secure orders to protect them from absconding and harm related to Child Exploitation (sexual or criminal) as there were in 2018/19.
- 6 children were adopted in 2019/20 (17 in 2018/19) and 21 made the subject to a Special Guardianship Order (19 in 2018/19). Looking at just looked after children with Special Guardianship Orders, 18 were made the subject of an order in 2019/20, up from 15 in 2018/19.

6.4 A monthly meeting is held within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service and the Youth and Communities Service that holds all Senior Managers to account on the key performance data and the quality of the intervention to families. From monitoring key performance indicators, we are able to identify that:

- 11% children who received early help in 2019/20 went on to receive a social care service
- 80% of children who received a Triage in 2019/20 were diverted from the Criminal Justice System
- Children have an allocated social worker within 48 hours of being referred to the service and following assessment have a plan that sets out the actions required to improve their outcomes; children newly allocated to a social worker are seen within 10 days (sooner if needed). This is monitored weekly
- Offence gravity for the YOS cohort is reducing overall as is the number of offences committed.
- Children who have child protection plans have a core group of professionals who have prescribed tasks in respect of their involvement with the child
- 99.1% of children who have child protection plans have their plan reviewed after three months and six monthly thereafter as per London Child Protection Procedures and where the review doesn't take place in time there are clear reasons for this
- In line with local and national figures 3% of the children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan have a disability
- 37% of children in the Criminal Justice System reoffended in 2019/20 (based on the Q4 2018/19 cohort)
- Only 7 young people received a custodial sentence in 2019/20, a significant reduction from 26 the previous year. This drop moves us in line with our closest comparators, having previously had a rate of custodial sentences that was very high, relative to other boroughs.
- Children looked after are seen at four weekly, six weekly or 3 monthly intervals in accordance with their needs and placement stability
- All children looked after are independently reviewed every six months
- Practitioner caseloads vary from an average of 12 to a maximum of 26 children per worker for Children in Need, 11 per worker for Disabled Children, 7-18 children per worker for Children Looked After and 5-7 in the Youth Offending Service. This variance is due to staff turnover and the need for newly qualified staff to have protected caseloads. A caseload of 15 children maximum is the accepted standard
- All cases are subject to supervision and management oversight at least monthly.

6.5 To assure the quality of our safeguarding services we routinely review qualitative information alongside performance data through our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). There are a wide range of activities which constitute the Quality Assurance Framework for Islington Council's Safeguarding and Family Support Service and the Youth and Communities Service. This enables the services to build a clear picture of the effectiveness of our practice with children, young people, and their families and to improve practice where needed.

- 6.6 The Motivational Practice model articulates a clear vision of good practice and sets out how practice quality should be measured against it. The child's databases are a system that allows us to collect and analyse a wide range of simple data, which over time allows us to track changes in demand and service delivery.
- 6.7 Good quality assurance ensures that we are doing the right things to a high standard. It helps us notice and attend to new challenges, build on and replicate our successes, and plan for future needs.
- 6.8 Twice a year, all senior managers and the Chief Executive, Executive Member for Children and Families and the Islington Safeguarding Children Board chair spend a week on the frontline observing practice and talking to social workers about the children, families, and carers they work with. The aims of practice week are:
1. Ensure Senior Managers understand what it is like for front line practitioners, walking in their shoes and gaining a deeper understanding of current frontline practice.
 2. Improve visibility of Senior Managers and role modelling the Motivational Practice model.
 3. Assist in consistency of understanding and practice throughout the organisation.
 4. Gather a deeper understanding of practice in relation to a particular theme – most recently children living with domestic violence and abuse, and children at risk of child sexual exploitation and gang involvement.
- 6.9 Activities include:
- Gathering feedback directly from families and children
 - Auditing case files along with social workers
 - Attending team meetings and group supervision
 - Attending home visits and professional's meetings, shadowing social workers
 - Observing supervision
- 6.10 In the year 2019-20 two Practice Weeks were undertaken. The first practice week took place in May 2019. Senior managers wanted a more detailed understanding of the quality of practice and decision making. In preparing for practice week, senior managers developed hypotheses and questions in relation to the practice themes, and discussed the lived experience of the child and parent/carers where practitioners were grappling with challenges around parental participation in Domestic Violence and Abuse cases, child sexual abuse within the family environment, children who reoffend and what could have helped prior to Targeted support. In total 171 activities were undertaken across Children's Social Care, Early Help and Youth & Community. The second practice week took place in November 2019 and was aligned with our 2018 JTAI Action plan and focused on Child sexual Abuse and Neglect. The auditing activity looked at planning for all children which included the visibility of key partner agencies in our child protection investigations and at key decision making points, as well as the inclusion of parents and carers in child protection, child in need plans and in the plans for our looked after children. The voice of the child and views of parents across child in need and children looked after service was explored. In our Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Targeted Youth Support we looked at the impact on children living with a sibling known to YOS and involved in criminal exploitation or serious youth violence. The week also addressed how well practitioners recognised the mental health of children open to YOS and TYS and how evident identification was seen in the assessment. In total 168 audit activities took place in the teams with a variety of different audit activities. Recommendations and actions plans were devised following Practice Weeks and monitored as part of the auditing activity across the services.

6.11 The Safeguarding and Family Support Service and the Youth and Community Service also undertakes a substantial number of themed audits in response to what the data tells us, feedback from children and families, feedback from staff and partners and following the introduction of legislation or guidance. Action Plans from each audit are then developed and monitored by the Senior Management team. The following gives examples of findings that have been used to improve practice throughout the year:

6.12 **Repeat Plans Audit**

In a period where child protection plans were reducing, the percentage of children subject to a repeat plan within 2 years had risen. From the 16 repeat plans that had been made, the findings were:

- Half of previous CP plans were of only a few months in duration although the vast majority continued to receive a service
- Half of current plans were repeated within a two-year period
- Domestic abuse remained a significant factor in such plans.

6.13 **Strategy Discussion Audit**

This audit examined the thresholds across the Child in Need (CIN) management teams and the impact on numbers of strategy discussions across the service. In teams where fewer strategy discussions took place there was a better conversion rate from strategy discussion to Child Protection Enquiry and Initial Child Protection Conference than in other teams.

6.14 **Physical Abuse Audit**

This audit of 30 children considered whether responses were proportionate to risk, whether the London Child Protection procedures were followed and whether health professionals were included within any strategy discussions held. Findings were:

- Response was proportionate in 28 of the 30 children.
- Health professionals were only included in 55% of strategy discussions
- Over a quarter of referrals passed through to CIN teams were not progressed to assessment
- Aside from the exclusion of health in just under half the sample strategy discussions, the child protection procedures had been followed.

6.15 **Repeat Referrals Audit**

Data from 01/09/2018 and 31/08/2019, showed variation across teams in terms of repeat referrals. In order to better understand this, re-referrals from two teams with the highest number were examined. Findings were:

- Decision to close/stepdown the case prior to subsequent re-referral was mostly deemed appropriate
- Consent appeared to be more of a factor in terms of cases being closed
- Most families being stepped down appeared to receive a service
- Evidence that partners were informed of case closure/stepdown remains varied
- Half of the children were re-referred for the same reason
- Teams with good performance around completing assessments and work turn over appear to have more re-referrals than those teams where there is more delay in completing assessments.

6.16 Core Group Meeting and CP Plans

This audit explored the practice around Core Group Meetings (CGM) and Child Protection (CP) Plans. Findings were:

- Core groups are well attended by family and by Health and Education
- The first core group is often held within time but practice varied with subsequent CG meetings although auditor felt this was a recording issue
- There are examples of good practice but overall there is a lack of consistency with social workers doing different things
- There often appears to be a lack of purpose and plans are not being reviewed
- It is not always clear who is chairing CG meetings
- Lack of voice of the child in CG meetings, even with older children
- Progress of plans only discussed in 12% of supervisions.

6.17 No Further action after referral

This audit looked at 65 children whose cases which closed after a referral was made into the children's service contact team, following the threshold decision made by the front door that cases met the criteria for assessment. The audit found in almost 82% of case the decision to not assess was right. Management oversight was evident.

No Assessment following Child protection enquiries:

This audit was of the 23% of Child Protection Enquiries that had an outcome of concerns being unsubstantiated (61 children).

The findings were:

- Decision to conduct an Enquiry was considered appropriate in 86% of cases
- The decision to take No Further Action was considered appropriate in 100% of cases
- Management oversight was evident in 73% of cases

6.18 TYS and CSC Audit

The focus of the audit was to examine the quality of joint work between Targeted Youth Support (TYS) and Children's Social Care (CSC). Findings were:

- Joint supervision was seen as useful and needs to be embedded in practice
- Evidence of shared understanding of young people's needs and purpose of intervention
- Good examples of joint working; both with young people, and with the wider professional network
- Communication between TYS and CSC is generally frequent and good but could be better evidenced on files
- Young people can be subject to multiple intervention plans.

6.19 IRO Footprint on case file

This audit looked at the numbers of entries on the child's file to see whether there are significant gaps identified, or discrepancies between different IROs recording. The findings were that Islington's IROs footprint on the casefiles is clearly evidenced. There were some individual variations which were addressed with respective IROs.

- 6.20 **Children subject to Care Orders placed under Parents with Placement Regulations**
This audit aimed to look into all the cases of children and young people subject to a Care Order and placed under Placement with Parents Regulations, to ensure that these placements continue to meet the needs of these children and young people and there is no drift and delay in planning for permanency for them. The findings were that at the beginning of August 2019, there were 8 children and young people subject to Care Orders placed under Placement with Parents Regulations. For the majority of these (7 out of 8) both the Care Order and the placement choice remained relevant and appropriate. There was one situation where the auditor was of the view that the Care order should be revoked.
- 6.21 **Independent case file audit YOS/CSC**
Two cases which had both YOS and Children's Social Care involvement were identified as needing extensive independent scrutiny. In one case it was established that early intervention was in need of improvement in terms of clearly identifying the complexity of issues and strategies to work with the case. Following this, the case was judged as Good quality work. Another case was identified as Good.
- 6.22 **Professional involvement in strategy meetings**
The audit looked at the professional involvement in strategy meetings and found that during the period 2nd February 2020 until 10th March 2020 there had been 181 strategy meetings/discussions held in Islington for 162 children from 88 families with 44% of the families having multiple children. 100% of the strategy meetings/discussions had police involvement. 72% of the strategy meetings/discussions had health professional involved, 29% of strategy meetings/discussion had evidence of educational professional involved, 23% of the strategy meetings/discussions had evidence of other professional's intervention such as: YOS, IGT, specialist exploitation leads, psychiatrist, youth worker, gangs police, mental health worker, CAMHS, Lighthouse or housing. In 17 of the cases there was clear evidence of the carers/parents being involved and/or their views recorded.
- 6.23 **Section 25, Children's Act 1989 - Secure Accommodation Reviews**
When the Local Authority is of the view that a young person has a history of absconding and would abscond from any description of accommodation and that when absconding is putting himself/herself at risk of significant harm and/or may harm others then an application for a Secure Order under s25 (Children's Act 1989) is made. If the order is granted, a Secure Accommodation Review needs to be held at statutory intervals and chaired by an independent person. In 2019/2020 there have been 4 young people from Islington who have been in secure accommodation and have had 8 secure accommodation reviews.
- 7. Contextual Safeguarding**
- 7.1 Continued analysis undertaken over the last two years consistently highlights that Islington's profiles of children and young people at risk, or a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation, harmful sexual behaviors, trafficking and modern slavery, gangs, and serious youth violence are intrinsically linked through vulnerability, peer groups and offending networks. The cohort of children and young people vulnerable to exploitation overlaps significantly with children and young people that go missing from home and care. In response to our profile, we have focused on developing a less siloed, and more flexible model of assessment, intervention and governance; ensuring that children and young people across the spectrum of risk receive timely and targeted interventions, and that those children at acute risk receive a consistent safeguarding response.
- 7.2 Islington's shift toward a more fluid approach to Exploitation and Missing risk supports a trauma

informed practice model; focusing more on the experience, vulnerabilities, strengths and needs of the individual child, rather than on the specific type of risk label and subsequent intervention pathway.

7.3 The response to Exploitation and Missing is currently led by:

- The Exploitation and Missing Team: managed by the Exploitation and Missing Safeguarding Manager. The team consists of a Specialist Social Worker for Gangs and Serious Youth Violence, a Specialist Social Worker for Child Sexual Exploitation and Harmful Sexual Behaviour and a Senior Administrator. The team work to develop the safeguarding response to children and young people through providing consultations, developing safety and intervention plans, chairing strategy meetings, developing and delivering training and awareness programmes, and linking in with multi-agency partners to create practice pathways and develop joint working.
- The Integrated Gangs Team (IGT): a multi-agency team co-located with the Police Gangs Unit, consisting of specialist intervention workers, St Giles Trust, Victim Support, The Abianda Project and Clinical input. The IGT work with children and young people up to age 25 years that are at risk of, or involved in, gangs and serious youth violence. This includes the Abianda Project that work to support and empower young women affected by gang violence.
- A Child Sexual Exploitation and Gangs Analyst: who works across services and data systems to develop exploitation network and risk profiles?
- The Return Safe Team: undertake Return Home Interviews provide ongoing support to children and young people that go missing.

7.4 The above teams also work closely with the local Police teams and the Community Safety Unit.

7.5 We have a clear and consistent format to the sharing of information to support safeguarding children and young people, and recognise that this is crucial to developing an understanding of peer networks and exploitation profiles. Information is shared at a practitioner level across the partnership through the co-location of staff, safeguarding meetings, consultations, Integrated Gang Team tasking meetings and community safety briefings etc. and fed back into safeguarding meetings to inform the response to children and families. This information is collated by the Child Sexual Exploitation and Gangs Analyst and feeds into to practice panels such as the Multi Agency Child Exploitation Panel (formally known as the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel) and the Exploitation and Missing subgroup. This also includes the council's response to contextual safeguarding focus areas such as creating safe spaces for young people through work with departments such as licensing and estate management.

7.6 Our offer to children is aligned with a tiered approach. Preventative education is delivered in both primary and secondary schools by a range of partners such as our Safer Schools Police who have an extensive Schools Engagement Programme, and our Targeted Youth Service and St Giles Trust who deliver a range of preventative assemblies and sessions. These include knife crime, joint enterprise, keeping safe, hate crime, Stop & Search, gangs, personal safety and social media. Victim Support work is delivered in schools through the IGT Victim Support Worker. Additional Knife Crime and Gangs Awareness work is particularly targeted at schools where there are concerns about youth crime and Anti-Social Behaviour. The Youth Crime Prevention Toolkit, a tool developed to support early identification and referrals on to targeted services is embedded within schools.

7.7 Children who are in need of a targeted service receive this through the early help offer. Our Targeted Youth Support team provide a range of interventions through a number of outreach programmes individually and group based to prevent escalation of contextual safeguarding. Through the parenting programme offer, parents of vulnerable adolescents receive advice and guidance on areas such as boundary setting, the adolescent stage and managing the balance between the push for freedom and the need still for protection. Our Early Help teams work

closely with young people and parents to educate them on risks, prevent missing episodes, manage social media safely as well as to ensure that parents are well informed about what to do if their child goes missing.

- 7.8 When a child is identified as at risk, a safeguarding strategy meeting is held. Strategy meetings are held across exploitation and missing risk areas, and dependent on the situation and risk may focus on a single child or a number of children. If a peer group, network or location of risk is identified by practitioners, through safeguarding meetings or practice panels, a mapping meeting will be organised. A mapping meeting is held with partners to pull together agency information, develop a better understanding of the network or location, and to develop an action plan to disrupt exploitation and improve the safeguarding of children and families. Children and young people from other Local Authorities are also considered as part of mapping meetings, and the relevant professionals are invited to attend and contribute.

8 Missing Children

8.1 Performance Information

During 2019/20, the total number of children missing from home and from care including away from placement without authorisation was 200. This is a reduction from 265 in 2018/19. This year, children aged 16 years old were most likely to go missing from home and children aged 17 years old were most likely to go missing from care. 60% of instances of children missing from home involved males, whilst 75% of instances of children missing from care involved males. This is an increase from 2018/19, where 53% of missing from home instances and 70% of cases where children were missing from care involved males. 34% of children reported missing from home were White British. This is an increase from 28% in 2018/19 and 17% in 2017/18. 9% were Black/Black British – Caribbean and 22% were Black/Black British – African (up from 10% the previous year). 20% of young people reported missing from care in 2019/20 were White British. 23% are children who have mixed parentage, 16% are Black/Black British – Caribbean and 22% are children who are Black/Black British – African.

8.2 Children Missing from Home - Length of Missing Episode:

In total 49% of the missing episodes involved young people going missing for less than 24 hours, and 21% involved children returning the following day. 1% of the missing episodes related to children going missing for more than one month. During these missing episodes, strategy meetings were held regularly, chaired by the Exploitation and Missing Team, and referrals to Rescue and Response (County Lines) and the National Referral Mechanism (Human Slavery and Trafficking) were made.

8.3 Children Missing from Care - Length of Missing Episode:

- 8.4 In total 52% of the missing episodes involved young people going missing for less than 24 hours, and 17% involved children returning the following day. 0.2% of episodes involved young people going missing for more than one month.

Additional Vulnerabilities of Missing Children:

When cross-matched with the risk hazards marker system for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Gangs and Serious Youth Violence we are able to see how many children that go missing from home and care are assessed as being at additional risk.

- **27** children who went missing this year are assessed as a category 1, 2 or 3 risk of CSE
- **36** children who went missing this year are identified to be either a gang nominal or considered to be at risk of gangs/serious youth violence.

- 8.5 This data shows a decrease from 2018/19 in terms of the number of children who go missing from

care and from home who are identified as at risk of CSE or at risk of gangs/serious youth violence

- 8.6 The percentage of missing from home children who had a county lines hazard in 2019/20 was 4% and for missing from care children was 10%.
- 8.7 When analysing the data for the 10 children who went missing most frequently between April 2019 – March 2020, it was found that 9 of these children were at risk of gang affiliation and 3 were at risk of child sexual exploitation. In addition, when looking at the 10 children who went missing for the longest period of time, it was apparent that 5 of these children were at risk of gang affiliation and 3 were at risk of child sexual exploitation. The Exploitation and Missing Team have started to focus on how it can improve the uptake of Return Home Interviews with this cohort, in order to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. We are working hard with multi agency partners to reduce the numbers of children going missing including those who go missing for longer periods of time and have exploitation risks. From April the Director of Safeguarding and the Superintendent of the Safeguarding Hub in the police co-chair a multi-agency partnership meeting of senior leaders for the children who are most at risk and are frequently missing. This ensures that risk assessments and plans for these children are scrutinised at the highest level.
- 8.8 Senior managers are immediately notified when a child goes missing. The Director of People Services and the Lead Member for Children and Families are briefed every Friday on children who are currently missing. This ensures oversight at the most senior level, the collection and scrutiny of these briefings is undertaken by the Exploitation and Missing Safeguarding Manager.
- 8.9. **Return Home Interviews (RHI's)**
Until July 2018, oversight of the Return Home Interview (RHI) process was provided by a designated Return Safe Team, which was based within the Youth and Communities Directorate, and led by a social work manager with three designated posts attached to complete this work. A recommendation was to bring the RHI team into the Exploitation and Missing Team to enable closer collaborative working in regards to children who go missing from home and from care and to focus on developing and improving the take-up of RHI's and engagement with children and young people. Since July 2018 the RHI team has been managed within the Exploitation and Missing Team, receiving direct supervision from the Senior Social Worker in the team. The aim of this is to support the child to feel able to share their concerns and discuss the missing episode with a professional they feel comfortable with. The percentage of RHI's offered within 72 hours in 2019/20 was 39%, which was a decrease from 54% in 2018/19. However, 94% of those who went missing were offered a Return Home Interview, which was in line with the previous year. New staff have been recruited this year and have improved the offer and uptake of Return Home Interviews.
- 8.10 **Missing from Education**
Children fall out of the education system for a variety of reasons which include:
- a) Failing to start appropriate provision and hence never entering the system at all;
 - b) Ceasing to attend, due to exclusion (e.g. illegal unofficial exclusions) or withdrawal;
 - c) Failing to complete a transition between providers (e.g. being unable to find a suitable school place after moving to a new local authority).

A range of robust procedures are in place for preventing pupils from going missing from education at these key transition points. For the financial year 2019/20, there were 38 Missing Pupil Alerts received by Pupil Services, the same number as the previous year.

9.0 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

9.1 Performance

The number of contacts Children Services Contact Team (CSCT) received in regards to CSE has reduced slightly, from 65 in 2018/2019 to 60 in 2019/20.

9.2 In 2019/20, 46 children were assessed as at risk of CSE. The majority of children who have been identified as at risk of CSE over the year 2019/2020 were female, 39, with 7 males being identified. A larger proportion of those identified in 2019/20 were male compared with the previous year. In regards to the age of children at the time they were assessed at risk of CSE, the most common age is 17, followed by 15 and then 14 year olds. With regards to the ethnicity of children assessed as at risk of CSE, 40% were White-British, 23% were Black-African and 12% were from a mixed ethnic group.

9.3 Between April 2019 to March 2020 47 young people who were considered to be at risk of CSE received intervention specifically tailored by the multi-agency network to reduce risks and address needs. For these 47 children the risk level either reduced or they were no longer considered at risk of CSE.

9.4 **Themes**

Throughout the year themes are identified, analysed and responded to by the partnership. The theme this year was young people being exploited via the internet and has remained a significant pressure issue throughout the year. It is an ongoing challenge to safety plan against adolescents need to seek out sexual contact, respond to attention and express themselves sexually when they have such free access to the internet. The Exploitation and Missing team regularly send out up to date resources for young people, families and professional on internet safety

10 **Modern Slavery / Trafficking**

10.1 **Modern Slavery** is the term used within the UK and is defined within the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act categorises the offences of Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour and Human Trafficking. **Human Trafficking** is the trade and/or movement of someone from one place to another for the purpose of enslavement and exploitation through: Forced labour, domestic servitude, organ harvesting, child related crimes such as child sexual exploitation, forced begging, illegal drug cultivation, organised theft, related benefit frauds etc and forced marriage and illegal adoption (if other constituent elements are present).

10.2 Islington Council and Police have identified SPOCS to lead on developing a joint response to modern Slavery/Trafficking. Named SPOCS across Children's Services since January 2019 training in Modern Slavery and Trafficking (including county lines) has been delivered through the Exploitation and Missing Team across Safeguarding and Family Support and Youth & Communities. This training covers the safeguarding response to children at risk of or victims of Modern Slavery and Trafficking including those at risk of county lines. Incorporated within this response are referrals the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the Rescue and Response team (for county lines cases).

11 **County Lines**

11.1 Between April 2019 and March 2020 a total of 26 National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals were made for children identified as at risk of criminal exploitation. From the 26 referrals, 25 involved males and one was for a female. The Exploitation and Missing Team are of the view that the training and awareness that has been provided across Safeguarding and Family Support and Youth & Communities, and the safeguarding response being embedded across the service, has contributed to earlier identification of county lines indicators. The ethnicity breakdown of young people identified as at risk of CCE has stayed very similar across the year. Data is reliant on the accurate recording and open to cross over, for example someone choosing "mixed parentage" or white and black British". In February 2020 40% of the young people identified as at risk of CCE where white, 50% black 10% mixed. A question that has emerged, while reviewing the data on young people's ethnicity is if existing services and processes are identifying young people from different ethnic and community groups as victims of CCE equally. Throughout the year intelligence from families, police reports, community groups and social care have indicated that young males of North African descent are being groomed and exploited from the Finsbury Park area of the borough. They are exploited to deal, run county lines and could possibly be missing for long

periods of time without services knowing. There are issues in regards to certain communities trusting the police and social care, pressures within their own community and issues of cultural shame. Services need to engage with the community and adapt services because currently these young people may not be being identified as victims until they are arrested with a large sum of drugs.

- 11.2 Strategy meetings and consultations in relation to County Lines are currently included within the data for gangs and Serious Youth Violence. For a number of children identified as at risk of county lines, they are also assessed as at risk of other forms of exploitation, including gangs and Serious Youth Violence, and CSE. The MACE identified a gap in terms of the MPS response to children at risk of Criminal Exploitation (CCE) as they do not fall into the current remit of the CSE or gangs Police unit. This, alongside pan-London discussions regarding the safeguarding response to child victims of CCE has led to a positive shift in the Police response to children at risk of criminal exploitation. Currently the Safeguarding Unit respond to any referrals in relation to CCE and will attend a strategy meeting as required. Decisions are currently being made within the MPS London wide, in terms of which unit in the Police will hold CCE cases moving forward, which will allow for further proactive work to be completed, as with CSE cases.

12 Serious Youth Violence (SYV)

- 12.1 Over the year 2019/20, a total of 106 children were referred to the Children Services Contact Team in relation to gangs or Serious Youth Violence. This was a slight decrease on the 125 in 2018/19. Safeguarding and Family Support and partners agree that this is likely due to the continued increase in training and awareness raising, promoting better identification, along with an overall fall in gang related criminal activity and Serious Youth Violence.
- 12.2 From April 2019 to March 2020 28 under 18 year olds have been identified as being at risk of SYV and 38 young people aged between 18-24. Out of the 67 young people identified as being at risk of being effected by SYV 2 were female. 31% of the young people were white, 25 from mixed parentage backgrounds and 44% were black. A large proportion of young people considered at risk of serious youth violence in Islington are black, which mirrors what is being seen across London.

12.3 Practice

- 12.4 As with CSE, Children's Social Care assess the level of gangs/SYV risk to a child in terms of categories 1, 2 and 3. When a child is identified as at risk of gangs/SYV, a consultation with the Specialist Social Worker is held, the majority of children assessed as at risk of gangs are at a level 2 risk, where they have been assessed as at risk of a violence or a threat of violence in relation to gangs. Over the last year 51 gangs/SYV consultations were held by the Gangs and Serious Youth Violence Specialist Social Worker with front-line practitioners and 112 Intelligence coordination checks were undertaken, in collaboration with the Integrated Gangs Team. In all cases where the gangs/SYV risk is assessed as a category 2 or 3, a strategy meeting will be convened with the relevant Police Unit. Where possible gangs/SYV strategy meetings are chaired by the Exploitation and Missing Team to ensure consistency and specialist overview. A gangs/SYV risk assessment tool has been developed and is currently being used by social work practitioners as part of a gangs and SYV specialist consultation, alongside a safety plan, tailored to the individual needs and risks for the YP. In the last year, 150 Serious Youth Violence strategy meetings were chaired independently of the Social Work Team, by the Exploitation and Missing Team. This figure has more than doubled compared to last year where there were 64 Serious Youth Violence strategy meetings. The children identified as at risk of gangs/SYV over the last year, have either been open to the Child in Need Teams, Children Looked after Teams or Independent Futures. They have received a service as a Child in Need, a child in need of Protection or a Child Looked After.

- 12.5 Strategy meetings are attended by the partnership, including, police, health and education and

any other services involved with the family such as IGT, housing and probation etc. A multi-agency approach is agreed at the strategy meeting in order to safeguard the young person at risk of gangs/SYV. When a child has been a victim of SYV or are at risk of gangs and are in hospital, the strategy meeting is held in the hospital, so that a discharge plan can be incorporated into the safety plan for the child and their family. Where the risks to a child and their family are so significant that they are not able to remain residing at the family home due to the location being known, immediate action is required in order for the family to move out of the borough for their immediate safety. Housing will be consulted prior to the strategy meeting and a housing representative will attend to provide advice and guidance. A rapid response is then provided by Safeguarding and Family Support and Youth & Communities, housing partners and police in order to move the family as part of the safety plan.

- 12.6 Over the last year there has been an increased focus on identifying the adults in connection with grooming and criminally exploiting the children and young people in relation to gangs, CSE, CCE and County Lines. This has resulted in a number of CAWN (Child abduction warning notice) being served on identified adults who are involved in criminally exploiting and grooming children into gang related activity. This response has led to changes in the way the police are starting to respond to children involved in Possession with Intent to Supply drugs and moped enabled criminality, including them being identified as victims of exploitation.
- 12.7 Since the scope of MACE was broadened in November 2018, the partnership has been better placed to consider the links between gangs and SYV, CSE, and CCE in terms of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Partnership. This has also supported the partnership to consider contextual safeguarding including specific locations in the borough which require intervention in order to reduce risks and safeguard children. Community Safety is now part of the MACE and we have seen some very positive examples of partnership working as a result of this.

13 **Financial Implications:**

- 13.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

13.2 **Legal Implications:**

- 13.3 The Children Act 1989 as amended, and the Children Act 2004, place a number of statutory duties on Local Authorities, including overarching responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area. The Children Act 2004 introduced the requirement to set up Local Safeguarding Children Boards. The Act also places partner agencies (including the police and health services) under a duty to ensure that they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when carrying out their functions. A range of other agencies are also required to cooperate with Local Authorities to promote the wellbeing of children in the local authority area.
- 13.3 The Children and Social Work Act 2017, (CSWA 2017), sets out how agencies must work together by placing new duties on the police, clinical commissioning groups and the Local Authority to make arrangements to work together and with other partners locally to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in need within their area.
- 13.4 The Council must have regard to the Statutory Guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, which is currently in the process of being amended to take into account the provisions of the CSWA 2017.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended) place further duties on Councils with regard to looked after children.

14 **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon**

Islington by 2030: None

14.1 Resident Impact Assessment:

14.2 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The Council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The Council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

14.3 A very high proportion of vulnerable children known to children's social care live in workless households. All social care interventions aim to address the needs of the whole family which include maximizing benefits and supporting routes into employment, education and training.
Although this report does not cover the period in May 2020 of the death of George Floyd, since the emergence of Black Lives Matter, and the recognition of racial discrimination. As a council we are committed to recognizing and readdressing the disproportionate numbers of children from black minority Ethnic families represented in our Youth Offending service, who are subject to child protection plans, and who make up our looked after children population. We are committed to addressing all inequalities and supporting our workforce with tackling these issues and to promote better understanding of the diverse community we serve.

14.4 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

14.5 The Council rightly places a high priority on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children in Islington. This report provides assurance about the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding and looked after children's services provided through a range of performance and quality assurance measures that are in place to ensure that services to Islington's most vulnerable children are as safe as they can be.

Appendices: None

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

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