



Report of: Interim Director of Children’s Services

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee		All

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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 from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

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 March 2021, Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service is currently working with 979 children in need, 349 children who are looked after, of which 25 are disabled children and 55 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), 586 care leavers and 194 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%). 5 children were living in a Private Fostering arrangement at some point during the year 2020/21. Islington’s Young Islington Service is currently working with 57 Youth Offending interventions. This includes zero custodial interventions, five remand interventions and 52 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 11th June 2021. This annual conversation is used to jointly identify areas for further scrutiny / inspection and is informed by the annual self-evaluation. This was a very positive meeting with no areas of concern or challenge identified. We do not expect any further Ofsted inspection activity in Children's Social Care until next year when we are likely to receive 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 and Families, Corporate Director of People, Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership 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 Partnership 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 council 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 Partnership (ISCP)**, formerly *Islington Safeguarding Children Board* is chaired by an independent chair and scrutineer. The *ISCP Executive* meets quarterly to set the strategic direction of the ISCP which also meets every quarter. The three statutory safeguarding partners, *London Borough of Islington, MPS Central North Borough Command Unit* and *North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group* have established a local

protocol for the functioning of safeguarding arrangements and is working well. The Government has announced a transfer of responsibilities from CCGs to *Integrated Care Systems*, which means the safeguarding responsibility that currently sits with the CCG's *accountable officer* will transfer to the *Chief Executive Officer* of the *Integrated Care Board*; work is under way to make the necessary amendments to the local safeguarding arrangements.

4.5 During the previous 12 months LBI informed the ISCP of four *serious child safeguarding incidents* which produced four *Rapid Reviews*, one of which led to a *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review* (Thematic Review of Children Looked After Placed at a Distance). A fifth notification of an Islington child was also made by London Borough of Croydon but a *Rapid Review* was not required in that instance. The ISCP have also overseen the completion of two *Serious Case Reviews* (Child P and Child Q). This year, the *National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel* has endorsed all the ISCPs recommendations.

4.6 In July 2021 the partnership reviewed and agreed its new priority areas for the next 3 years:

- Addressing the impact of neglect on children, including by helping them to become more resilient.
- Adolescents at Risk of Sexual and Criminal Exploitation
- Addressing the consequences / harm suffered because of domestic violence, parental mental health, and substance abuse.
- Impact of inequality and structural racism on vulnerable children and to create a better understanding of data across the partnership

The strategic work-plan is being developed with the chairs of the ISCP sub-groups to take this work forward. The sub-groups are Quality Assurance, Training and Workforce Development, Missing and Child Exploitation, Case Review, Education and Early Help Subgroup.

4.7 The ISCP annual report evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding and child protection in Islington and the ISCP August 2019 – September 2020 report was 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 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. It should be noted that during this reporting period that the impact of Covid-19 has been a factor and some of the data collected, and audits carried out throughout the year were designed to understand the impact and ensure services were continuing to safeguard vulnerable children and families.

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 indicator 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 11,147 contacts requesting a service for children in 2020/21, an increase from 2019/20.
- The most common source of contacts was the police (34.4%), followed by schools (10.2%)
- The most common reasons for contacts were domestic violence (15.6%), information requests (10.9%), parenting capacity (10%), child mental health (7%), specific concerns regarding a sibling (6.9%), parental mental health (5.3%), and parental dispute (5%).
- 3,843 (36.2%) went on to receive an early help service and 1,918 (18.1%) went onto receive a social care service
- We had the 23rd highest rate of assessed Children in Need in the country in 2019/20.
- We had a higher rate of children with child protection plans per 10,000 compared to our statistical neighbours (SN) in 2019/20 (47 per 10,000 for Islington, 38 per 10,000 for our SN)
- We have carried out a much higher rate of child protection enquiries than statistical neighbours
- We had a lower proportion of repeat child protection plans compared to our SN in 2019/20 (18% compared to SNs 20%). The figure for Islington for this year end 20/21 is 10.5%.
- 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 2020/21
- We applied to court for orders to protect children more than most other boroughs, we had the 25th highest nationally.
- Islington has more children looked after per 10,000 than the SN average, and only one SN had a higher rate in 2019/20
- The proportion of Looked After children who had to move more than three times during a year is slightly lower than our SN (9.8% compared to 11.0% in 2019/20)
- 89 children in our care moved 2 or more times in 2020/21. 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, have exploitation risks 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 86 in 2019/20 to 55 in 2020/21), and fewer 11-15-year olds (from 57 in 2019/20 to 41 in 2020/21)- this is in line with our transformation programme
- 16.5% of young people are remaining with their foster carers after their 18th birthday and 36% move to semi-independent accommodation
- 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

- 66 children were placed more than 20 miles away (19%)
- No children were subject to secure orders to protect them from absconding and harm related to Child Exploitation (sexual or criminal). For the 2 years preceding this was 4 children.
- 5 children were adopted in 2020/21 (6 in 2019/20) and 15 made the subject to a Special Guardianship Order (21 in 2019/20). Looking at just looked after children with Special Guardianship Orders, 9 were made the subject of an order in 2020/21, down from 18 in 2019/20.
- Covid 19 meant that school attendance data could be collected and shared by cohort, the average attendance for the academic year for CIN was 86%, CP 81%, CLA 88% & YOS 56%.

6.4 A monthly meeting is held within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service and Young Islington 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:

- 10% children who received early help in 2020/21 went on to receive a social care service (reduced marginally from 11% in 2019/20).
- 89% of children who received a Triage in 2020/21 were diverted from the Criminal Justice System (increased from 2019/20 at 80%).
- 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 has increased in 2020/21, despite a drop in the overall number of offences.
- Children who have child protection plans have a core group of professionals who have prescribed tasks in respect of their involvement with the child
- 97.8% 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
- 10.9% of the children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan have a disability in 2020/21, while national figure is 3%.
- 27% of children in the Criminal Justice System reoffended in 2020/21 (based on the Q4 2019/20 cohort)
- Only 2 young people received a custodial sentence in 2020/21, a significant reduction from 7 the previous year and 26 the year before. This drop moves us in line with our closest comparators
- Children looked after are seen at four weekly, six weekly or at 3 monthly intervals in accordance with their needs and placement stability, this was both face to face and virtual depending on risk assessment and need during lockdown
- All children looked after are independently reviewed every six months, this has been conducted virtually in most cases during Covid
- Practitioner caseloads vary from an average of 12 - 15 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 A key theme that these monthly meetings have focused on during the latter half of the year has been disproportionality in Safeguarding and Family Support. Whilst services were keenly aware there was disproportionality between different ethnic groups amongst the cohorts of Children in Need, Child Protection Plan and Looked After Children, compared to the Islington population, a detailed 'deep dive' looked at the journey through the social care system for young people from different ethnic groups, and differences in outcomes. Amongst the findings were:
- Black-Caribbean and Mixed ethnicities are over-represented amongst children's social care contacts and referrals compared to the Islington population of children.
 - A higher proportion of contacts from Schools and Police are for children from a Black ethnic group, compared to contacts from other agencies.
 - Black young people referred by schools are more likely to be referred due to abuse or neglect than other ethnic groups.
 - However, once we look at the key factors identified during assessment, the factors that are recorded significantly more often for Black young people are 'gangs' and 'socially unacceptable behaviour'.
 - It took on average around 200 days longer for an Islington child of Mixed ethnicity to move in with their adoptive family after they became looked after, compared to White-British children. This is consistent with the findings from a 2000 study across England.
 - Black-Caribbean children and young people are more likely to come into the social care system repeatedly – this ethnic group has the highest rate of re-referrals and the highest rate of becoming subject to child protection plans for a second or subsequent time.

Following these findings and others, services are now considering what can be done to affect this disproportionality. This includes work with our partners and the findings were shared at an ISCB Away Day in July 2021.

- 6.6 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 Young Islington. This enables the services to build a clear picture of the effectiveness of our practice with children, young people, and their families. During Covid-19 some Quality Assurance Activity has been very fast paced and focused on gaining an immediate understanding of the service delivery on children and young people.
- 6.7 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. Covid-19 interrupted this but not to a significant as the data collected was still meaningful.
- 6.8 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.
- 6.9 Usually twice a year, all senior managers and the Chief Executive, Executive Member for Children and Families and the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership chair spend a week on the frontline observing practice and talking to social workers and practitioners about the children, families, and carers they work with. In 2020/21 due to Covid-19 restrictions there was one Practice Week in the main carried out virtually by Senior Managers.

The aims of practice week are:

1. Ensure Senior Managers understand what it is like for front line practitioners and gaining a

- deeper understanding of current frontline practice.
2. To help understand the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of services to families and to measure support staff were able to access while working remotely.
 3. Assist in consistency of understanding and practice throughout the organisation.
 4. Gather a deeper understanding of practice in relation to a particular theme.

Activities include:

- Gathering feedback directly from families and children
- Auditing case files along with social workers
- Virtual observations of group supervision and one to one supervision
- Virtual observations of home visits and professional's meetings
- Parental and staff feedback

6.10 This year Practice Week was undertaken in November 2020. Due to Covid-19 Children's Social Care had to make some adjustments to how work with children and families was carried out. For some children and families face to face visiting and meetings moved to Virtual meetings, visiting on Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, and WhatsApp. The aim of this year's practice week was to ensure senior managers understood the experiences of frontline practitioners during the Pandemic by gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of front-line practice and how it has impacted on the children and families they worked with during Covid-19.

The areas of focus was also looking at the interventions for children aged 13 to 17 years old who were at risk of becoming looked after or who had recently become looked after. Managers were asked to look at interventions to learn what preventing or coming into care has meant for those children and measure the impact of the intervention. Bright Start 0-5s and Bright Start 5-19 audited the interventions offered to families during the Pandemic with 0-5 having a specific focus on parental mental health and 5-19 auditing the level of engagement and the quality of the service.

In total 121 auditing activities was undertaken across Children's Social Care, Bright Start 0-5 and 5-19.

The overall findings were that practice across the services was good or outstanding. Despite Covid-19 restrictions families still received a good service, children were regularly visited, and staff continued to receive a good level of management support through supervision and oversight. The voice of the child was evident in files. For children at risk of coming into care, the provider services like AMASS was seen as an effective intervention that both parents and practitioners found useful. Covid-19 was not seen to have an enormous impact on the delivery of service and auditors found evidence of direct work and effective interventions being carried out creatively by staff during the Pandemic.

Children aged 16 and 17 years old came into care for reasons other than homelessness, and where that was a reason other factors such as exploitation, mental health or long-term parental issues were also factors. For all young people, other than those entrenched in exploitation, outcomes improved as a result of coming into care. The feedback of staff was rated highly, and young people felt supported. Overall Covid-19 did not impact on service delivery, and children looked after and at home were visited in accordance with the level of need.

6.11 **Quality Assurance Activity:**

The Safeguarding and Family Support Service and Young Islington 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 CP Plans**
An audit of 17 repeat Child Protection Plans (for 22 children) in 2020/21 looked at the times lapse between plans.
Most Plans were repeated after a time gap of over two years. 41% were repeated within a 2 year period. Like previous years, the most common risk factor in repeat plans was Domestic Violence and Abuse.
53% of the repeat plans also had parallel escalation and planning, meaning that there was no drift or delay and children's cases were within a legal framework - Court or Pre-Proceedings

6.13 **Children Isolated at home due to Covid-19.**
This audit was of children who had been in isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Audit looked at whether their RAG rating matched their need and whether safeguarding measures were being carried out in accordance with their RAG rating. The findings were:

- All children rated RED were seen face to face in line with their high risk level and risks were managed well.
- Amber rated children seen in person or via video
- Evidence of social workers demonstrating creativity in seeing children and meaningful work with children and their families, even via video.
- Risk ratings on the whole matched need.
- Network checks carried out for most children.

6.14 **FGCs and identifying alternative care**
This audit was in response to Islington's Ofsted inspection in 2020, which suggested that although Family Group Conferences routinely take place and respond to children's immediate support or care needs, they do not consistently consider or identify alternative carers within the family. The findings were:

- 42 referrals were made for an FGC in 2019/20 where the primary reason was looking for alternative care.
- 31 (74%) progressed to an FGC (Higher than the London rate at 66%)
- 29 of these resulted in a plan that included detail about alternative carers.

Therefore, 94% of family plans considered or identified alternative carers.

6.15 **Supervision Orders**
This audit was undertaken in response to a rapid review action plan regarding a child who was on a Supervision Order who suffered serious harm, to review whether Islington's protocol and minimum standards were being adhered to. The findings were:

- Areas of good practice included use of chronologies, continuity of social workers, good rapport with
- Children and families, good understanding of children's lived experience and good supervision.
- Areas in need of improvement were multi-agency involvement in devising plans, lack of
- Supervision Order (CIN) meetings, lack of purpose and momentum in working with children on
- Orders
- Need for assessments that reflect children's needs and greater management oversight.

Subsequently an improvement plan was put in place and included:

- Case file upgrade to include a supervision order flag
- Monitoring data about children on supervision orders at performance meetings.
- Regular Audits of cases independently

Supervision Order policy updated to emphasize greater management oversight.

6.16 **CP Plans over 18 Months**
This audit was undertaken in response to an increase in CP plans over two years with following findings:

- Of the 19 child protection plans, 16 had undergone parallel family court proceedings, which contributed to the length of the CP plan.
- There were just three children from two families that were not subject to family court proceedings but had long plans due to the chronic nature of the risks.

6.17 **Re-Referrals**
This audit was carried due to an increase in re-referrals from the previous year. While the majority of re-referrals were deemed unpreventable, the following practice themes were identified:

- **Information sharing:** some assessments were incomplete because of a misconception that Social workers and their manager's had needed consent for agency checks.
- **Refusal of Service:** A considerable proportion of families refused a service first time around, even though social care identified that one was required.
- **Adolescents at risk:** Social care is the principal agency responsible for safeguarding but is the last agency young people or their families wish to engage with. Specialist agencies like TYS or YOS may be tried initially but if there is a safeguarding need, this is re-referred to CSC.
- **Domestic violence and abuse:** Re-referrals are a reflection of the cyclical nature of abuse women are caught in but also the trauma it causes contributes to children and young people developing problems such as vulnerability to exploitation and serious youth violence later in life.

- 6.18 **Timescale in initial child protection conference:**
 This audit was carried out in a response to the lower level of conferences held within statutory timescales than the rest of London. There were 44 initial CP conferences for 79 children that were over the 15 working day timescale from the strategy discussion (65% - the London average is 75%). The findings were:
- 58% were late by just a few days, most between one and seven days.
 - 40% were late bookings by social workers, most of which could have been avoided since they were families already receiving a service.
 - 45% were late due to illness or other availability issues, which has been more marked due to the pandemic.
 - No child was left at risk due to delay
 - Delaying a conference at times may be preferable in order to ensure the meeting is more meaningful and purposeful.
- 6.19 **Care Planning for Children Under the age of 6 years old;**
 The aim of this audit was to evaluate the use of permanency planning in reducing drift and delay in securing permanency for these children and to look at their outcomes. The findings were:
- There is evidence of good practice and the permanency planning for children is evidenced on their records.
 - Where there are sibling groups, there is evidence of assessments being undertaken to inform where and how to place those sibling groups.
 - Some improvement is needed on the consistent application of the Permanency planning protocol.
 - The audit recommended that the implementation of the permanency planning protocol is strengthened to ensure more timely referrals.
- 6.20 **Young People's participation in CLA Reviews:**
 Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic social workers had to modify the way they worked. The move to virtual meetings also meant the way children's wishes and feelings were captured changed from paper consultation forms to electronic forms which were sent to young people in care via email, or to their phones.
 The aim of this audit was to ensure that despite the Pandemic, IROs and SWs understood experiences of our Children Looked After during lockdown, the audit key findings were:
- The use of electronic correspondences saw an increase in children completing their consultation forms.
 - Children and young people still raised the same issues, with their future placements and contact with family the most consistent issues raised.
 - The majority of children were happy in their placements and were able to express their concerns in respect of living in a pandemic.

- 6.21 **Children Looked After under the age of 15 years old under Section 20**
The aim of the audit was to establish whether children accommodated under S.20 aged 15 or younger are under the appropriate legal framework to care for them, the findings were:
- The audit found in all cases the use of Section 20 was appropriate and the LA is adequately care planning for all the children.
 - In 20% of cases the legal status was not recorded correctly on LCS, therefore raising with managers the need to ensure more robust systems are in place to update LCS of change of legal status.

- 6.22 **Repeat Episodes of Care**
The aim of this audit was to review the decision making and factors which led to a child coming into Care a subsequent time. There were 7 children who re-entered care during April, May and June 2020. The findings were:

- The complex nature of some of the circumstances children and families live in were highlighted making care the best option at the time to safeguard those children.
- The decision to accommodate those children was proportionate and kept them safe.
- The use of Family Group Conferences should be considered earlier.
- The child and family assessment should explicitly identify the support provisions required to help with reunification.

- 6.23 **Young People in Secure accommodation**
This audit looked at 13 children who had been the subjects to welfare secure accommodation in the previous years. The audit was to analyse the data and the circumstances which led to them being placed in a secure placement. The audit showed 7 children were placed in a secure provision for secure welfare and 6 in secure for criminal grounds. All children from that cohort had suffered early childhood trauma where they were exposed to prolonged domestic violence and abuse, substance misuse and parental mental health.
There was a disproportionate number of black children, and their families were on low incomes. The audit highlighted the need to consider a multi-agency wrap-around response to managing risk and providing support in the community as an alternative to care and reduce the need for a secure provision.

- 7**
7.1 **Contextual Safeguarding**
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 behaviours, 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. 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.

- 7.2 The response to Exploitation and Missing is currently led by:
- The Exploitation and Missing Team are managed by the Exploitation and Missing Safeguarding Manager. The team consists of three Specialist Social Workers, a senior administrator and two Missing and Intervention Workers.
 - All three social worker cover Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence, Harmful sexual behaviour and missing. One of the social worker posts is the named social worker for the Integrated Gangs Team but the tasks and responsibilities are split between all three of the specialist social workers through the duty system.
 - The Exploitation and Missing Intervention workers are managed by the exploitation and missing safeguarding manager. The two workers complete the return home interviews, deliver targeted intervention for vulnerable adolescents who are frequently missing, deliver training and assist with designing specialist interventions plans for young people at risk of exploitation and missing.
 - The CSE and Gangs analyst, this post works across services and data systems to develop the understanding of exploitation networks and risk profiles. Since February 2020, the manager for the Integrated Gangs Team has managed the post. This has been a positive move which has benefited both teams and the service.
 - The Integrated Gangs Team (IGT) is a multi-agency team co-located with the police gang's 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 and are at risk of, or involved, in gangs and serious youth violence
- 7.3 The above teams also work closely with the local Police teams and the Community Safety Unit.
- 7.4 There is 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.
- 7.5 Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic the Exploitation and Missing team had to make changes, and for most of the year all worked from home. The Return Home Interviews were carried out over the telephone/virtually with young people. All meetings and training moved online.
- 7.6 Due to the Lockdowns the Exploitation and Missing team were not able to deliver group work in schools. This is something that will be picked up again in 2021/2022 as in previous years the team were delivering sessions to more than 500 children a year. This year the team did manage to deliver training across the partnership to include children's social care, Early Help, Targeted Youth Support and both National and local GP forums. The on-line training delivered over the last year included Child Exploitation, Harmful Sexual Behaviour, Trafficking and County lines, SYV and Philomena protocol missing.

- 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 2020/21, the total number of children missing from home and from care including away from placement without authorisation was 156. This is a reduction from 200 in 2019/20. This year, children aged 15 and 16 year olds 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 which was the same last year, whilst 72% of instances of children missing from care involved males. This is a decrease from 2019/20 where 75% of cases where children were missing from care involved males. 27% of children reported missing from home were White British. This is an increase from 34% in 2019/20. 8% were Black British Caribbean and 30% were Black British African (up from 22% the previous year). 19% of young people reported missing from care in 2019/20 were White British. 14% are children who have mixed parentage, 8% are Black British Caribbean and 21% are children who are Black British African. This data continues to highlight the disproportionate number of black children reported missing each year, and work in ongoing across the service to understand this, and to address this.

8.2 Children Missing from Home - Length of Missing Episode:

In total 52 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**

In total 75% of the missing episodes involved young people returning the next day or earlier, an increase of 5% from last year. This figure supports the development being put in place through the Philomena protocol as previously young people had been recorded as missing but were returning to their placements late. 4% of missing episodes were for young people who went missing longer than a week, this is a reduction from 7% last year. This equates to 30 separate incidents where young people went missing from care for longer than 1 week. In previous reports there has been exploration around the difficulty of producing statistics for how many young people who have gone missing have been identified as at risk of exploitation and or serious youth violence. This is because young people could be identified at different risk levels throughout the year producing duplicate results.

For example, out of 927 missing episodes throughout 2020/21, 294 of them were relating to a child that was considered at risk of serious youth violence and 359 of them were children who were at risk of child criminal exploitation. It is therefore more useful to explore further the vulnerabilities of the children who have gone missing most frequently throughout the year, especially as 10 children accounted for 41% of the total missing episodes. In the 2019/20 report all 10 young people who went missing most frequently were considered at some point throughout the year to be at risk of exploitation or serious youth violence. However, in 2020/21 there were 2 young people who were not, one of whom was a young person who went missing most frequently.

8.4 In response to the connection between missing and additional vulnerabilities the initial sit-down strategy meeting for missing young people is chaired by the exploitation and missing team so that a contextual and multi-vulnerability approach is taken. If a young person is at risk of being exploited in a gang linked setting then they are included in the IGT search stream document meaning if they are missing it will be monitored in discussions with IGT, Exploitation and missing team and gangs police.

8.5 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.

8.6 **Return Home Interviews (RHI's)**

Where possible, every child that goes missing from home or missing from care is offered a Return home Interview. Between April 2020 to March 2021, 776 RHI's were offered to children missing from care and those that were missing without authorisation. 72% have been completed, in 93 episodes (18%) the child refused the interview, in 45 episodes, 9% it was not possible to contact the child for the interview to go ahead after several attempts, in 4 episodes (1%) were not required due to it being an unauthorised absence, in 264 episodes, (34%) were not possible as the child was still missing. When a return interview is requested but not completed (ie. the child refused, or multiple contact attempts were unsuccessful), the allocated social worker is contacted so that they can make alternate arrangements to discuss the missing episode directly and at times complete the return home interview.

8.6 **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 200/21, there was one young person where they had not been located and all avenues had been exhausted and there were 4 ongoing investigations.

9 **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

9.1 **Performance**

The number of contacts Children Services Contact Team (CSCT) received with regard to CSE has reduced, from 75 in 2019/20 to 53 in 2020/21.

9.2 In 2020/21, 41 children were assessed as at risk of CSE. The majority of children who have been identified as at risk of CSE over the year 2020/21 were female, 38 with 2 males and 1 transgender young person. A larger proportion of those identified in 2019/20 were male compared with this year. Regarding the age of children at the time they were assessed at risk of CSE, the most common age is 15, followed by 17 and then 14 and 16 year olds. With regard to the ethnicity of children assessed as at risk of CSE, 39% come from a White ethnic background, 37% come from a Black ethnic background and 17% were from a mixed ethnic group.

9.3 Between April 2020 to March 2021 25 young people who were considered to be at risk of CSE and received intervention were assessed as having their CSE level 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 still 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 professionals 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 categories 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. There are named SPOCS across Children's Services. Training in Modern Slavery and Trafficking (including county lines) has been delivered through the Exploitation and Missing Team across Safeguarding and Family Support and Young Islington. 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).

In January 2021 Islington and Camden Social Care were successful in a bid they made to Home Office to be part of the pilot project to explore how decision making for the NRM could be devolved and built into local safeguarding procedures. The year long pilot will see the formation of a monthly panel attended by representatives from Islington and Camden children's social care, YOS Central North Police, Community Safety, Rescue and Response and Health. The Home Office will continue to filter the NRM applications, but the majority will be sent to this Monthly panel to make a Reasonable or Conclusive ground decision.

11 County Lines

11.1 Between April 2020 and March 2021, a total of 16 National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals were made for children identified as at risk of criminal exploitation. From the 16 referrals, 15 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 Young Islington, 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. For 2020/21, 51% of the young people identified as at risk of CCE were Black, 29% White and 13% mixed. The data around ethnicity helps the exploitation and missing team think about what young people may be more vulnerable to exploitation, but also who may be referred into services, how they are assessed and how risks are identified.

The team have continued to have good working relationship with the British Transport Police and there are effective communication routes between the services. BTP have contributed to meetings focusing on the vulnerabilities of Finsbury Park relating to young people being criminally exploited and trafficked. If a young person is at risk of criminal exploitation the threshold may be met for an NRM application under the Modern-Day Slavery Act 2015. Professionals across the whole service have a good understanding of the process and reason for applying for an NRM.

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 responses 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 2020/21, a total of 76 children and young people were referred to the Children's Services Contact Team in relation to gangs or Serious Youth Violence. This is a decrease on the 125 in 2019/20.

12.2 From April 2020 to March 2021, 32 under 18-year olds have been identified as being at risk of SYV and 42 young people aged between 18-24. Out of the 74 children and young people identified as being at risk of being affected by SYV 3 were female. During Lockdowns and due to Covid, young people were more identifiable when congregating in groups. Young people were staying at home more rather than being in locations where they could be groomed into gang linked violence. However, we know that a lot of grooming and rivalry between groups has moved online during this year creating challenges on being able to fully assess whether individuals had made positive choices and were no longer at risk of being involved in SYV. IGT, gangs and the exploitation and missing team will review all SYV flags on the system in 2021 to see if the intel is still relevant.

In looking at ethnicity and SYV over the year 58% of the young people were black 29% White, 13% Mixed parentage backgrounds. 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. Ethnicity is an important factor to consider when thinking about risk of SYV. Studies have looked into how perpetrators of SYV pick their victim when undertaking ride outs into rival areas. It appears that it is not just due to the physical location of the victim, they also pick someone they think is likely to be affiliated with a gang and their view is influenced by what age, gender and race of a stereotypical gang member media projects on society.

12.3 **Practice**

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 Young Islington, housing partners and police in order to move the family as part of the safety plan.

12.4 Since the lockdown the police and social care have seen a very large increase in young people being stopped with "prescription" drugs. Young people have been found with large amounts of Xanax and diazepam. It is a significant concern that it appears young people are also taking the drugs alongside being exploited to deal them. Some young people have had to be hospitalised due to taking these drugs. Young people and families do not understand the medical impact of taking this sort of medication without a prescription and when it is mixed with alcohol and other drugs.

The pandemic has affected the ability to pull out themes and data for this year report as it will take some time to notice the patterns and be able to attribute them to the pandemic and/or the changing nature of exploitation. For large periods of the year it was more difficult for organised crime groups to get drugs in and out of the country and there was a thought this would reduce the need to exploit young people to run drugs. However, what the service has observed was young people running drugs were more obvious on transport and out in the community so were coming to police attention when possibly before they would have gone undetected meaning numbers have evened out. When the lockdowns were lifted drugs were once again needing to get to different parts of the country and this meant our young people were exploited to run the drugs. The drugs people were taking also changed throughout lockdown, Heroin addicts were noticeably engaging in treatment programmes which was a positive and also due to the quality and strength of the street

heroin being so poor. People were also taking less party drugs such as ecstasy due to clubs and pubs being closed which may be a reason there was as demand for drugs such as Xanax, which also may have been easier to get into the country during lockdowns.

- 12.5 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 Implications

13.1 Financial Implications

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.

- 13.4 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.

- 13.5 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.

- 13.6 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

- 14.1 None

15 Resident Impact Assessment:

- 15.1 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.

- 15.2 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.

The Pandemic has had an impact on those families who will find employment opportunities difficult to access.

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.

15.3 **Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

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

Signed by:

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