

Report of: Corporate Director of Children's Services

Meeting of: Children's Scrutiny Committee

Date: 8 September 2022

Ward(s): All

## Subject: Child Protection Annual Report

### 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

### 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 980 children in need, 357 children who are looked after, of which 21 are disabled children and 57 are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), 582 care leavers and 188 children with child protection plans. 61% 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, adult mental health, and adult alcohol or substance misuse. 5 children were living in a Private Fostering arrangement at some point during the year 2020/21. As of March 2022, Islington's Youth Justice Service is currently working with 50 Youth Offending interventions. This includes 2 custodial interventions, five remand interventions and 43 community interventions.

There are more boys (55%) than girls (45%) supported; and the age profile varies across the status of children, with significantly more adolescents looked after than younger age groups. Some ethnic minority groups are over-represented in comparison to the Islington child population, while others are under-represented. Children of Black Caribbean and Mixed backgrounds are over-represented across all CIN, CP and CLA groups, Black Caribbean and Black African young people are over-represented in the care-leaver cohort. Work has been focused in the year on reducing the disparity across the Safeguarding services and with the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership.

3.2 In 2020 Islington had 1 full (ILACS) 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."*

There were 2 recommendations which have been fully implemented through an Action Plan:

1. The timeliness and quality of planning for children at high risk in the community, when they are placed back with their parents while alternative accommodation is sought needs to improve.

It should be noted that there is between 0 and 3 children that fall into this remit at any one time. An action plan regarding this finding and recommendation was drawn up during the actual inspection. It contained a strategic and an operational stream with 19 associated specific actions, including senior leadership partnership oversight, development of protocols, quality assurance and a multi-agency monthly partnership meeting to review the children.

2. The engagement of care leavers in pathway planning and the consistent provision of health histories needs to improve

An action plan regarding this recommendation was drawn up and submitted to OFSTED after the inspection. It contained 2 overarching actions. These have all been implemented.

3.3 Our routine Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted has been set for September 2022. This annual conversation is used to jointly identify areas for further scrutiny / inspection and is informed by the annual self-evaluation. We expect further Ofsted inspection activity in Children's Social Care and Early Help in late 2022, early 2023. We are still awaiting the long overdue Youth Offending Inspection by HMIP.

3.4 Between 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Islington to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The findings were positive including fully committed council members in providing the very best for children and young people with SEND. Many parents spoke of very positive experiences and productive partnerships with schools and early years settings. Many parents praised the efforts of school staff, including special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), in supporting their children's educational needs. Inspectors also found that children and young people under the age of 18 receive

comprehensive support while they wait for a diagnosis of ASD and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This Committee had SEND as its scrutiny focused piece of work and concluded with a number of recommendations. A year on report has been provided to this Committee regarding the implementation of those recommendations

#### 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 Leader of the Council and attended by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, the Chief Executive, the 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)**, 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*, to come into effect from July 2022, 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 three *Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents* which produced one Multi-Agency Management Review and two *Rapid Reviews*, one of which led to a *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review*. The ISCP have also overseen the completion of two Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews (Child R and Child U). 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:
- Address the impact of inequality and structural racism on vulnerable children and to create a better understanding of data across all of Islington Safeguarding Partners.
  - Address the impact of neglect on children and help them become more resilient.
  - Address the consequences of harm suffered by children because of domestic violence, parental mental ill health, and substance abuse, including helping who have suffered harm to become more resilient.
  - Identify and help children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and gangs.

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 Vulnerable Adolescents, Case Review, Education and Early Help.

The ISCP annual report evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding and child protection in Islington and the ISCP August 2020 – September 2021 report was presented to the Committee in February 2022.

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

- 5.1 The DfE granted nearly £5m from 2012-2018 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. We have a team who go into other Local Authorities Social Care Services and more recently their SEND services to work alongside staff and leaders until their OFSTED rating changes from Requires Improvement to Good.
- 5.2 The Motivational Practice model is relationship based and feedback from children, families, staff, and services has been very positive. Ofsted also commented on the model: *"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.

A review of the Motivational Practice model which is now wholly council core funded is underway, conclusion and implementation date for any changes is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

## **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 on children and families of the pandemic 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 12199 contacts requesting a service for children in 2021/22, an increase from 2020/21.
  - The most common source of contacts was the police (29.9%), followed by schools (15.0%)
  - The most common reasons for contacts were domestic violence (14.4%), parenting capacity (10.8%) information requests (8.4 %), child mental health (8.3%), specific concerns regarding a sibling (6.4%), Physical Abuse (6.1%) and parental mental health (5.6%).
  - 4724 (38.5%) went on to receive an early help service and 2325 (19%) went onto receive a social care service
  - We had the 32nd highest rate of assessed Children in Need in the country in 2020/21.
  - We had a higher rate of children with child protection plans per 10,000 compared to our

statistical neighbours (SN) in 2020/21 (48 per 10,000 for Islington, 45 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 2020/21 (10.5% compared to SNs 21%).
- 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. The average duration of a child protection plan in 2021/22 is 7 months
- We applied to court for orders to protect children more than most other boroughs, we had the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 Children Looked After who had to move more than three times during a year is slightly lower than our SN (9.8%)
- 42 children in our care moved 3 or more times in 2021/22. 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 55 in 2021/21 to 35 in 2021/22). There is a slight increase in 11-15-year olds (from 41 in 2020/21 to 45 in 2021/22).
- 42 young people are remained with their foster carers after their 18th birthday
- 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
- 63 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 proceeding this was 4 children.
- 2 children were adopted in 2021/22 (5 in 2020/21) and 24 made the subject to a Special Guardianship Order (15 in 2020/21). Looking at just Children Looked After with Special Guardianship Orders, 10 were made the subject of an order in 2021/22, up from 9 in 2020/21.
- Average attendance for school age Children Looked After in the academic year 2020/21 was 81.8% compared to 89% for all pupils and 60.2% for school age children open to the Youth Justice Service. 17.8% of Children Looked After and 20% of YJS children received a fixed term exclusion with no permanent exclusions for either group.

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 2021/22, 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%.
- 20% of children in the Criminal Justice System reoffended in 2021/22 (based on the Q4 2020/21 cohort)
- 4 young people received a custodial sentence in 2021/22, a slight increase from 2 the previous year but a significant decrease from 26 in 2018/19. 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 was conducted virtually in most cases during Covid, all reviews are now held face to face.
- 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 in line with our Motivational Practice Model. The voice of the child is clear and social workers evidence direct work with children.
- 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 Children Looked After, compared to the Islington population, a detailed 'deep dive' looked at the journey through the social care system for children and 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 address this disproportionality. This includes work with our partners and the findings were shared at an ISCP 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 extent 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 Executive Member for Children, Young People 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 2021/22 despite some Covid-19 restrictions we held two Practice Weeks.

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 and direct observations of group supervision and one to one supervision
- Combination of virtual and direct Observations of home visits and professional's meetings
- Parental and staff feedback

6.10 This year Practice Week was undertaken in June 2021 and November 2021. Due to Covid-19 Children's Services staff had to make some adjustments to how work with children and families was carried out. Children subject to child protection plans or Children Looked After were seen face to face by their social workers for home visits. Some meetings moved to Hybrid with a few Virtual meetings on Microsoft Teams, which allowed for families or professionals to contribute to meetings where it was not possible for everyone to attend. The aim of this years' Practice Week was to ensure senior managers understood the experiences of families and frontline practitioners.

In June 2021 Practice Week included the children open to the Children in Need teams, the Disabled Children's Service, Children Looked After teams, the Fostering service, and our Care Leaving Service Independent Futures. The Practice Week also included parents who were care leavers, and adolescents who were impacted by domestic abuse. This allowed managers to review their intervention and to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the interventions and support those young people received. As well as looking at domestic violence and abuse, the SEND Inspection audit was undertaken. The audit aimed to elicit any key themes that emerged that may help identify practice strengths and any gaps in SEND Practice area to ensure that as a social care service work is being carried out collaboratively with the children, parents, carers, health and education. The audit also looked at how the local areas meet their responsibilities to children and young people from birth to 25 who have special educational needs or disabilities. The audit also looks at the offer made to children from Children's Social Care, CIN and CLA/IF and children from Early help.

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. Domestic violence and abuse interventions were generally good with evidence of safety planning with clear risk assessments including identified protective factors. The review of children receiving support via SEND and EHCP was positive and evidence of collaborative planning and support for those children was identified as strong. Areas for improvement across the services were addressed and reflected in the positive SEND inspection carried out in November of 2021.

The second practice week of 2021 was conducted in November. As a senior leadership team, it was agreed the week would look at a number of different areas of practice. During the pandemic, the data and performance team showed that re-referrals had increased slightly and although the timeliness of assessments had improved, the numbers of referrals had increased. It was therefore agreed that Practice Week would look at all the children where following their Child & Family Assessments the recommendation was step down to a tier 2 provision within the last 6 months.

Another factor considered was the increase in contacts to CSCT over 2021 since the beginning of the Pandemic. The data showed that as well an increase in contacts a significant proportion were progressing to Early Help Services for support. The question raised was whether the increase was a reflection of the increasing needs within the population or whether there had been any shift in the application of threshold at the initial point of decision making. Therefore, a multi-agency audit was carried out that looked at 100 children referred in 2021 to examine the application of threshold decision and how the London Continuum of Need Threshold is applied and whether it is consistent. The data provided over the last 2 years told us that on average any child made subject to child protection plans for over 14 months are either in Pre-Proceedings PLO or subject to Care Proceedings. During practice week the senior leadership team looked at those children to help understand:

the impact of progressing into proceedings  
whether entering care proceedings was the most proportionate response  
the overall outcomes for those children where proceedings had been issued.

The audits completed showed the proceedings were necessary safeguards for those children and the interventions were proportionate. The feedback from CAFCASS and judges supports that view and that care proceedings are issued where necessary and children experienced care planning which minimised delay in the implementation of permanency planning.

The week also involved auditing the work of child subject to Care Proceedings to establish whether an alternative action would have made a greater impact.

The practice identified continuous strengths and the majority of files audited were either good or outstanding practice, 84% rated as good. Auditors found 97% of assessments stepped down to early help were agreed. Overall auditors agreed that for cases in PLO and proceedings the response was proportionate and 75% of the cases rated as good and 20% outstanding, court interventions were seen, as necessary.

In considering our Care Experienced children from our leaving care service, there was auditing activity on the quality and timeliness of the review of pathway plans as during the Pandemic the numbers of Pathway Plans completed on time fell. The Senior Management Team therefore wanted to understand the impact of a delay on completion of a Pathway Plan for care leavers and audited any plan overdue by 3 months or more. The auditing activity found there a only 7% were delayed and were still receiving a service and interventions were in place. The auditing also showed that the data had picked up children not eligible for a pathway plan due them being in care for less than 13 weeks, or had returned home within 13 weeks of being looked after.

#### **6.11 Quality Assurance Activity:**

The Safeguarding and Family Support Service and Young Islington Service also undertake 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/or 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 audits and associated 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 were seen in person or via video as per operational procedure
- 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 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. The purpose was to review whether Islington's protocol and minimum standards regarding Supervision Orders 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 the need for 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 due to the delays in Court Proceedings during Covid.
- 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.

### **Child and Family Assessment with an No Further Action Outcome:**

This audit set out to understand C&F Assessments of 275 children from 131 sibling groups that resulted in no further action (NFA) in the period between April to December 2021. The Audit found that

- Almost 50% of C&F Assessments concluded that there was no unmet need of the child assessed.
- Domestic Violence was the most consistent reason for referral for an assessment.
- Managers must ensure stepdown to other agencies is the preferred option to NFA prior to closure.

### **SYV 3 or more contacts between April 2020 to August 2021:**

This themed audit took place considering 43 children and young people for whom there were three contacts for either serious youth violence (SYV) or Child Criminal Behaviour (CCB). The 43 children were from 34 siblings' groups with just one young person identified as the index child of concern. The purpose of the audit was to review the threshold decision at the front door, to establish if intervention could have been in place earlier. The audit found that:

- No child or young person had concerns raised about the response to the referrals being disproportionate or left any child at risk.
- One child had been stepped down with the caveat he would be re-referred to social care if he did not engage, the case closed to a targeted service without re-referring.
- The number of contacts did not reflect a revolving door for young people
- A number of contacts were not due to interventions ending and being re-referred.
- Threshold decisions were considered proportionate.

### 6.19 **Health Involvement in Strategy Discussions**

The purpose of this audit was to look at the involvement of our health partners in strategy discussions/meetings, between January to March 2021. The audit considered 95 children who had met the threshold for a strategy discussion and whether health provided a view in respect of the outcome of the strategy discussion/meeting. The findings of the audit affirmed that health and all the key partner agencies are involved consistently in strategy discussion across the Children in Need Teams.

In the Children Looked After service and Independent Futures health were not involved in all strategy discussions and therefore managers were to attend refresher training and details of the MASH safeguarding health advisor were shared with the CLA and leaving care teams to improve compliance in those teams

### 6.20 **GP Reports to Conferences**

70 Child Protection Conferences held during June and July 2021 were audited examining the reports submitted by GPs

- 62 conferences (89%) received a GP report
- 8 conferences had no reports submitted
- 93% of reports were submitted on time
- 90 % were on Islington template
- 98% were judged to be fully completed
- 90% judged satisfactory

#### 6.21 **Review of Permanency Protocol**

This audit was commissioned to review the effectiveness of the Permanency Team's involvement in permanency planning for young people aged 12-14. The audit recommended that:

- Selection meetings need to ensure good decisions are made about children aged 12-14 years old
- Together and Apart assessments are completed for all siblings where there is a consideration of placing them apart

6.22 **Permanency Planning for Children Age under 6 Years old** The audit found some children in care could have had their plan for permanency action earlier to ensure they experience no delay in being placed in long term permanent families. This led to the recommendation of the need to strengthen the permanency planning protocol to ensure planning is explored at the earliest opportunity and also recommended that:

- Quality of permanency planning minutes need to improve.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) recommendations should always include referrals to permanency planning meetings for all children
- IROs should trigger the dispute resolution process where these decisions are not implemented.

6.23 **Placement with Parents Regulations Including Vulnerable High-Risk Children at Home Awaiting Placement.** Some children at risk of contextual and extra familial harm on Care Orders may experience placement breakdown and are at home until a placement can be identified. An audit was undertaken to ascertain if the protocol is consistently followed for these children, and the multi-agency network were working together to safeguard children while at home under care orders

- The timeliness of recording the legal and placement status of all children to be recorded within 24 hours.
- Children were safeguarded and multi-agency safety plans were in place.
- The High Risk Panel had scrutiny over the plans and regularly reviewed their effectiveness.

#### 6.24 **Experience of Virtual Children Looked After Reviews**

Following Covid lockdown in 2020 and social distancing the changes in the legislation which provided guidelines to assist some statutory duties, the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) moved from face to face to virtual meetings. The aim of the audit was to explore the experience of virtual reviews in order to learn from it and ensure we adjust future practice to consider the learning.

All the respondent with the exception of 1 were of the view that the virtual CLA review went well or very well. The advantages of a virtual meeting meant less travelling long distances, greater flexibility and using time more efficiently and that reviews were less intrusive/intense or demanding for children. The disadvantages identified were technical issues, attendees getting distracted doing other tasks and the lack of human interaction and difficulties if serious issues were to be discussed and potentially difficulty for young people to engage via video conference. All the respondents except 1 preferred a combination

of virtual and face to face reviews and decisions being made on a case-by-case basis.

- A recommendation to apply a flexible approach to take into account the particularities of each circumstance
- Where safe and agreed the relationship between the IRO and the child/young person should be prioritised as its important for the child/young person to have an independent person to share their views, wishes and feelings.

The IRO to ensure that these are given consideration in the review process

## **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/Criminal 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. The participation of children is essential and their wishes, feelings and lived experience is represented fully at child protection conferences via consultation forms and other methods of direct work.

- 7.2 The response to Exploitation and Missing is currently led by:
- **The Exploitation and Missing Team:** The team work to develop the safeguarding and intervention plans, chairing strategy meetings, developing and delivering training programmes as well as linking with the multi-agency partners to create practice pathways and develop joint working. Managed by the Exploitation and Missing Safeguarding Manager. The team consist of 3 specialist social workers, a missing coordinator and an Exploitation and Missing intervention worker. ASIP joined the team when it launched in June 2021
  - **Specialist Social Workers:** All three social workers 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.
  - **Exploitation and Missing Intervention workers:** The work is primarily to undertake Return Home Interviews (RHI) for children reported missing from home and care. Their work helps with early identification of children reported missing and to allow for early intervention and engagement with vulnerable children to prevent future missing episodes.
  - **Child Exploitation and Gangs Analyst:** This post works across Services and data systems to develop the understanding of Exploitation networks and risk profiles. This post was recruited to in February 2019 and in February 2020 it was agreed, after consultation, the manager from the IGT would line manage the post. This has been a positive move which has benefited both teams and the service.
  - **Adolescent Support Intervention Project ASIP:** The Adolescent Support Intervention Project, is a wraparound edge of care service that aims to prevent young people who have contextual risks from becoming looked after and being placed in specialist provisions usually located outside of the borough. The team consists of four ASIP Case Managers, as well as one CAMHS Clinical Psychologist, a contextual safeguarding and education lead and the practice manager. The work consists of working closely with not only the young person, but also with their family, their peer networks, with services that they access such as education and through upskilling the professional networks that surround them. ASIP is a psychologically and trauma informed service that is underpinned by the principles of the community psychology, narrative therapy as well as drawing upon elements of psychoanalysis (Attachment Theory), co-production and family systemic therapy. Children and young people have fed back they feel listened to and supported by their ASIP worker. They have established trusting relationships and utilised the trust helped inform how to improve the way ASIP work with new children coming into the service.

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 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 of the ISCP. 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 The Exploitation and Missing team have returned to working in the office but still hold some meetings with professional virtually or as hybrids. Strategy meetings are hybrid with the social work team and E&M practitioner generally meeting in person at the office with other professionals such as police and health joining via video. Return Home Interviews were completed over the telephone with young people during lockdown restrictions, this moved towards face to face where possible. Young people have said in feedback that having the choice of both face to face or virtual is helpful for them to share their views.
- 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 will continue to prioritise training and awareness raising within schools and across the partnership to bring the training offer in line with previous years. The team did manage to deliver training across the partnership to include children's social care, VCS, Community Child Health, Foster Carers, Designated Safeguarding leads, Lambeth Child Protection Co-Ordinators (as part of PIP) and external partners.
- 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**

From April 2021 to March 2022, the total number of children missing from home and from care including away from placement without authorisation was 190. This is an increase from 156 in 2020/21. This year, children aged 14,15- and 16-year-olds were most likely to go missing. However, there is a disparity between the age groups. Over the last year 14-year-olds accounted for 16% of those missing from home episodes, 15-year-olds accounted for 36% and 16-year-olds accounted for 12%. This year children aged 17 years old were most likely to go missing from care, totalling 36% of the total numbers of episodes. The numbers have remained consistent from 2019-20 and 2020-21 when the numbers of children missing from care were 30 and 39% respectively.

Over the last three years we have seen a gradual shift in which gender are most frequently missing from home. In 2019/20 males were more often reported missing at 59% whilst females were at 41%. In 2020/21 the numbers were evenly split at 50% for both male and female. Over the last year we see that females accounted for 64% of the missing from home episodes with males at 35% and non-binary at 1%. Far more males than females were reported missing from care, with 71% of children reported missing being male. This has remained consistent, from last year when it was 72% male and 28% female. In children classified as away from placement without authorisation 25% were female and 75% male.

This year the data indicates that there is still an over representation of Black children reported missing from care. The breakdown for the year 2021-2022 is as follows;  
White British 26% White Irish 5% Black British Caribbean 7%, Black British African 17%, 9% were any other African background, 2 % Black British other 4% were White and Black Caribbean and 15% mixed parentage.

### **8.2 Children Missing from Home - Length of Missing Episode:**

In total 54% of the missing episodes from home involved children returning in less than 24 hours and 24% of episodes related to young people returning the following day. Meaning 78% of the missing episodes involved young people returning the next day or earlier which is aligned with the missing from care figures and is an increase of 5% on the year before for children missing from home.

1 child was missing from home for over a month. There were concerns that they were at risk of sexual exploitation. 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 where needed.

### 8.3 **Children Missing from Care - Length of Missing Episode**

In total 77% of the missing episodes involved young people returning the next day or earlier, an increase of 2% 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, the same as last year. This equates to 24 separate incidents where young people went missing from care for longer than 1 week.

In previous reports, we have explored 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 meaning there would be many duplicate results. It is because of this we have to look at the number of episodes, rather than the unique children who have gone missing, and those figures are limited in how useful they are.

It has been found more useful to explore further the vulnerabilities of the children who have gone missing most frequently throughout the year.

In 2021/22 there were 10 children who went missing most frequently. All the 10 children were considered at some point throughout the year to be at risk of exploitation or serious youth violence. 7 of the 10 children who went missing most frequently were male. All 3 female and were considered at risk of sexual exploitation. 7 of the most frequently missing children in 2021/22 are looked after children.

- 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 team.
- 8.5 Senior managers are immediately notified when a child goes missing. The Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children, Young People 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 and associated interventions 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 2021 to March 2022, 719 RHI's were offered to children missing from care and home. This also included those away from their placements without authorisation. In 105 episodes, (15%) the child refused the interview, in 208 episodes, 29%, it was not possible to contact the child for the interview to go ahead after several attempts. 9 (1%) were not required due to it being an authorised absence. For 281 episodes, (39%) it was not possible for the RHI to be conducted as the child was still missing. For all other children the RHI was undertaken.

When a Return Home Interview is requested but not completed (i.e., the child refused or multiple contact attempts were unsuccessful), the allocated Social Worker is contacted so that they can make alternative arrangements to discuss the missing episode directly and at times complete the return home interview.

The role of the Specialist Missing and Engagement Worker has expanded over the last two years, and now as well as undertaking the return home interview, they will now offer some of the young people 3 – 6 intervention sessions. These are offered to young people who frequently go missing and to those who may go missing less frequently but the indicators show that they could be being exploited or there is an escalation in concerns. This work has proved very successful and is built on the theory around contacting a family and/or young person at the "reachable moment".

## 8.7 **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. Schools are very clear about their duties and responsibilities for securing pupils' regular attendance and seeking LA support.

For the financial year 2021/22, there were 44 missing pupil Alerts by pupil services, 24 children (55%) were found and returned to school and 15 (34%) were not found, 4 (9%) had unconfirmed school destinations abroad and 11 (25%) with an unknown location, 5 (11%) are currently open.

## 9 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

### 9.1 Performance

During 2021/22 46 young people have been identified as at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In 2020/2021 41 young people were identified as at risk of CSE, and in 2019/2020 the number was also 46. The slight decrease in numbers last year was likely due to the lockdown, and less children being out of the home. Although we are aware that children are often groomed online, but again due to children and parents having less contact with professionals during this time, incidents of online grooming and child sexual exploitation may have gone unreported.

The majority of children who have been identified as at risk of CSE in 2021/2022 are female (41) with 4 males and 1 young person who is transgender and identifies as a male. In 20/21 there were 4 males identified as at risk of CSE. Given the small numbers it is difficult to identify any patterns or themes around this. Two of the males had an open hazard for a short period (1 month) the concerns were in relation to their older sibling but as the exploitation was happening in the family home it was felt that they could also be at risk. One of the other males was groomed online to send images of himself. He had additional emotional and mental health needs which may have made him more vulnerable. The ethnicity breakdown of young people identified as at risk of CSE has shifted since 20/21 particularly in relation to Black and White young people. This year 50% of the children identified as being at risk of CSE were white compared to 36% last year and 23% were Black in comparison to 39% in 20/21. Although young white females make up the majority of the children identified as being at risk of CSE, this does not mean that young people of other ethnicities are not at risk. The numbers remain consistently low for Asian young people, and we need to question whether we are reaching all ethnic groups in the borough, to help understand the reason for this low number.

9.2 Regarding the age of children at the time they were assessed at risk of CSE, the most common age is 16, followed by 17 year olds, last year 15-year-olds were the most common age. The next highest ages were 15- and 13-year-olds. This year there are also 2 children aged 12 years old. There is an increase in younger females being identified as at risk of CSE and this is an indication of agencies identifying the risks earlier on a which is initiating early responses from services.

### 9.3 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 issue throughout the year. Children and young people have stated their preferred forms of communication as online sources like, "ticktock" and "Snapchat". 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. One of the specialist social workers in the Exploitation and Missing team has completed a course and is a CEOP ambassador and disseminates resources and information across the borough. Islington has run regularly online parent sessions to inform them how to keep young people safe online.

## 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 saw 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 **Child Criminal Exploitation**

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. Between April 2021 and March 2022 51 young people, under the age of 18, were identified as being at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation this is a small decrease on the year before when the number was 55. 11 out of those 51 were female, in 2020/2021 the number was 5 and in 2019/20 there was only 1 female identified as at risk of CCE. This is a significant increase, and it has been noted over the last year that new cohorts of younger children and these groups are mixed in terms of gender. We are seeing more females coming to police attention for criminal activity.

In one month, there were 39 young people with a CCE hazard on their file records. The data showed that 16- and 17-year-olds make up the largest age group identified. Older young people may be stopped and searched by police more and therefore more likely to be found in possession of drugs, indicating they are being exploited to deal or run county lines. Older children may be used to transport drugs around the country because if a younger person was seen alone on public transport, they may be more likely to be approached by staff or police. It is likely that while grooming younger children the elders will use them to run drugs around the local area, building their trust and grooming them to the point they can trust them with large amounts. Whilst also potentially placing them at continued risk of being set up in a robbery placing them in debt and entrenched further in the exploitation.

The ethnicity analysis of the cross section of young people who were considered at risk of CCE, in the one month selected (March 2022), shows that 30% of the young people were recorded as Black, 33% as white, 23% having mixed parentage and 7% as Asian. This shows almost the same percentage between White and Black young people at risk of CCE. Over the last year there has been robust work across the partnership directed to raising awareness around the over representation of black children identified as at risk of CCE. The data would indicate that this work is making an impact and improvements moving in the right trajectory.

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 2021/22, a total of 86 children and young people were referred to the Children's Services Contact Team in relation to gangs or Serious Youth Violence. This is an increase in 2020/21 which was 76. Also of the total 86 1 was female.

From April 2021 to March 2022 39 children have been identified as being at risk of Serious Youth Violence. In the same period of 2020/21, there were 32, showing a slight increase. It should also be noted that 47 young people were over the age of 18 also these are the young people in March 2022 so why there were identified as at risk of SYV some of those 47 young people may have been under 18 years old.

In looking at ethnicity and SYV across London Black children continue to be overrepresented and is a pattern also represented in Islington.

Over the year 58% of the young people were Black 29% White, 13%, Mixed Parentage backgrounds. 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 that 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 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 Services, housing partners and police in order to move the family as part of the safety plan. Feedback from children and their families via LSCPR have recommended a thinking period to allow families time to reflect and play a meaningful role in the moving on plan, if one is agreed. That way relocation of families is more likely to be successful and careful consideration given to where the family eventually live.

- 12.4 Last year 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 especially when it is mixed with alcohol and other drugs. This has continued to be a concern and the team continue to raise awareness and training across different services.

- 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. There is a shared commitment to improve school attendance, we know that children open to Children's Services are over-represented among persistent absentees and there are robust plans in place to improve attendance as part of education plan that involves collaboration across the partnership. As a council we are committed to recognising and readdressing the disproportionate numbers of children from Global Majority families represented in our Safeguarding and Youth Justice Services. 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 Children Looked After 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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Date

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