

Children's Services

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Report of: Corporate Director of Children's Services

Meeting of: Children's Scrutiny Committee

Date: October 2024

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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

2. Recommendations

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

- 3.2. As at end of March 2024, Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service was working with 913 children in need, 298 children who are looked after, of which 37 were disabled children and 44 were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), 765 active care leavers and 181 children with child protection plans. 85% of child protection plans are due to emotional abuse or neglect. 8 children were living in a Private Fostering arrangement at some point during the year 2023/24. As of March 2024, Islington's Youth Justice Service was working with 30 Youth Offending interventions. This included two custodial interventions, two remand interventions and 26 community interventions.
- 3.3. There are more boys (53%) 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's free school meal (FSM) eligible child population, while others are under-represented. The highest levels of FSM eligibility in Islington schools are amongst White-Other (i.e. excluding White-British and White-Turkish / Turkish-Cypriot). Black-Caribbean & Black African pupils, whilst Asian, Bangladeshi and Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot pupils have the lowest levels of FSM eligibility. 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, as are the White Other and Asian Other ethnic groups. Work has been focused in the year on reducing the disparity across the Safeguarding Services and with the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- 3.4. In March 2020 Islington had their full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). 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.
- 3.5. Ofsted carried out a focused visit in October 2022 where inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care experienced children and young people. The findings from this visit were positive and inspectors found "exceptional and aspirational corporate leaders work together to listen to care experienced young people, to understand their work and to act on their views. A stable and an ambitious vision driven by the Chief Executive and lead members are key factors in their success. Islington's Motivational Practice Model ensures that all staff and many partner agencies provide trauma informed assessments.

- 3.6. The findings were extremely positive, and inspectors found “exceptional and aspirational corporate and operational leaders.
- 3.7. Our routine Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted took place in June 2024 where an updated version of our Self Evaluation was presented, the feedback from Ofsted was Islington will have a full inspection under the ILACS framework as part of our next regulatory overview. At this stage we are not able to confirm when this will take place, however we would anticipate this taking place towards the end of 2024 or likely early 2025. We continue to rigorously prepare for our next inspection and have appointed a Strategic Inspection Readiness Lead to assist us with our preparations and ensuring all the required documentation requested by Ofsted in advance of the full inspection is current and reflects all relevant updates.
- 3.8. In January 2024 Ofsted introduced a separate graded judgement to the existing ILACS framework. This judgement focuses specifically on the experiences and progress of care leavers. At the time when Islington have their next inspection this judgement will form part of our overall outcome.

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 Children and Young People, Independent Scrutineer 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 Scrutineer 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. The meeting scrutinizes the quality assurance activities across the safeguarding partnership and provides assurance to the leader of the Council and the Chief Executive that children are safeguarded and quality assurances activity tests this. There is scrutiny of the local information and performance data on referrals, data, and referrals coming into the organisation. This provides an oversight of the quality of responses to interventions, assessment timeliness, outcomes and impact.
- 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, Metropolitan Police Service Central North Borough Command Unit and Integrated Care Board (Health) have established a local protocol for the functioning of safeguarding arrangements, and this is a well-functioning an arrangement.
- 4.5. During the previous 12 months London Borough Islington informed the ISCP of three Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents which led to the convening of three Rapid Review Meetings, one of which led to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). The review for Child B a 14-year-old child looked after who died by suicide, this review is ongoing and not yet completed. The ISCP have also overseen the completion of two Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews in this reporting period which started in the previous year, namely the thematic review for Child X and Child W. This year, the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has endorsed all the ISCPs recommendations of whether to conduct an LCSPR. This endorsement from the National Panel would indicate our thresholds are accurate and that we are able to demonstrate learning can be implemented from within the partnership.
- 4.6. The ISCP held a partnership away day in June 2023, focusing on revising the ISCP's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements whilst also outlining the new priorities for 2023 to 2024. The priorities are as below:
- Structural inequalities (disproportionality and inequality)
 - Early Intervention and Prevention (Family Well-being)
 - Socio Emotional Mental health and special Educational Needs and Disabilities for children
 - Neglect and parental factors.

The day emphasized the need for more multi-agency training, better integration of children's voices, and adapting plans considering upcoming changes and reforms to the "Working Together" 2023 statutory guidance. Feedback from the day has informed the ISCP's strategic direction, with a final report presented at the Executive meeting for the Delegated Statutory Partners. The strategic work-plan is being developed with the chairs of the ISCP sub-groups to take this work forward. The sub-groups are as follows: Quality

Assurance, Training and Workforce Development, Missing and Vulnerable Adolescents, Case Review and, Education and Early Help.

- 4.7. The ISCP annual report evaluates the effectiveness of promoting the welfare and safeguarding the children of Islington. The next ISCP Annual Report has changed its reporting period to April to March to align with the new Working Together to Safeguard children guidance. As a result, it will report from Sept 2022 to March 2024 (therefore a report capturing an 18-month period.) This will adjust to new statutory guidance. This report is to be presented to Committee in September 2024.
- 4.8. The ISCP annual report (September 2022 to March 2024) will still focus on the previous ISCP priorities which are as follows:
- Address the impact of inequality 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 their families in helping them become more resilient this includes the implementation of a revised and refreshed neglect tool kit to assist practitioners in measuring the impact of neglect.
 - 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.

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 SEND services to work alongside staff and leaders until their OFSTED rating changes from Requires Improvement to Good. Within this reporting period our Partners in Practice Team have provided sector led

improvement to Croydon, Southend, Lewisham and Tees Valley. The team are now working alongside Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Harrow and Bristol.

- 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.*
- 5.3. A review of the Motivational Practice model which is now wholly council core funded was undertaken during the year and changes were implemented on 1st April 2023. The review findings reconfigured the model due to a reduction in demand. The conclusion of the review meant staff in the Children in Need service and Children Looked After service could be reduced without increasing caseloads above acceptable levels. Teams in the child in need service are now delivered out of 6 locality teams which were ward areas, and are aligned with the now locality areas North, Central and South which sets the service up for future likely legislative changes which are expected to combine Early Help and Children in Need into “Family Help”.

6. Performance Management and Quality Assurance

- 6.1. In order to ensure that Islington’s most vulnerable children are safe and that our services continuously improve, a range of quality assurance measures are employed to continually test the quality of our service provision and to learn lessons about how to improve.
- 6.2. Through performance management we can 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 indicators that is not evidenced through good 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 for this reporting period tells us that:

- 6.4. We received 13,934 contacts requesting a service for children in 2023/24, an increase from 2022/23 (12,346). The most common source of contacts was the police (26.1%), followed by schools (16.09%)
- 6.5. The most common reasons for contacts were Information requests (12.8%) and domestic violence (12.4%), Parenting Capacity Difficulties (10.15%), child mental health (9.7%), Physical Abuse (5.1%) and parental mental health (5.2%).
- 6.6. 6372 (45.9%) went on to receive an early help service and 2175 (15.6%) went onto receive a social care service.
- 6.7. We had the 19th highest rate of assessed Children in Need in the country in 2022/23. Rates of CIN and CP were based on the population estimates prior to the publication of 2021 National Census data. Therefore, the population figures used for Islington were considerably higher for the 0-17 age group.
- 6.8. The rate of children with child protection plans as of 31st March 2023 was 37 per 10,000 children. While not the highest among our statistical neighbours (SN), it was higher than the average combined rate of 34 per 10,000 children. Islington's rate of child protection enquiries was the 5th highest among our statistical neighbours. We had a higher proportion of repeat child protection plans compared to our SN in 2021/22 (24% compared to SN average 21%).
- 6.9. 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 that ended in 2023/24 was 12 months.
- 6.10. We applied to court for orders to protect children more than most other boroughs, we had the 47th highest rate out of 150 nationally in 2020/21. As the rate is from 2020/21, the population estimates used were overestimating the current Islington population. Islington has more children looked after per 10,000 than the SN average, and only one SN had a higher rate in 2021/22. The rate was calculated using population estimates based on 2021 national census, which had Islington's population considerably lower than previously estimated.
- 6.11. The proportion of Children Looked After who had three or more placements was in line with our SN (10%) in 2022/23. 36 children in our care at year end had 3 or more placements in 2023/24. 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.

- 6.12. The number of children becoming looked after has decreased from 132 in 2022/23 to 123 in 2023/24. 46 children have remained with their current carers after their 18th birthday as at the end of March 2024.
- 6.13. 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.
- 6.14. 73 (24.5%) children looked after, excluding UASC and placed for adoption at the end of March 2024 were placed more than 20 miles from home outside the LA Boundary.
- 6.15. One child was 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.
- 6.16. 5 children were adopted in 2023/24 (2 in 2022/23) and 18 made the subject to a Special Guardianship Order (12 in 2022/23), all of whom were Children Looked After, doubling from 9 in 2022/23.
- 6.17. Average attendance for school age OC2 Children Looked After (i.e. the cohort that had been looked after for a year or more) in the academic year 2022/23 was 89.3% compared to 92.1% for all pupils. 16.7% of OC2 Children Looked After received a suspension in 2021/22. There were no permanent exclusions.
- 6.18. Average attendance year to date for school age children open to the Youth Justice Service was 45% as at July 2024. Of the 2023/4 YJS cohort, 48% had ever been suspended and 8% had ever been permanently excluded.
- 6.19. 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.
- 6.20. 11% children who received early help in 2023/24 went on to receive a social care service (increased marginally from 9% in 2022/23).
- 6.21.
- 6.22. 91% of children who received a Triage in 2023/24 were diverted from the Criminal Justice System. Performance has been consistently above the target of 85% each year since 2020/21. The cohort, however, is shrinking, and this can affect the actual percentage. For the past three years (2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24) the average diversion is 92%.

- 6.23. 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.
- 6.24. Offence gravity for the YOS cohort has increased a little in 2023/24, while the overall number of offences has continued to fall.
- 6.25. Children who have child protection plans have a core group of professionals who have prescribed tasks in respect of their involvement with the child.
- 6.26. 97.5% 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.
- 6.27. 8.9% of the children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan have a disability.
- 6.28. 6% of children in the Criminal Justice System reoffended in 2023/24 (based on the Q4 2022/23 cohort). The average percentage of children and young people reoffending over the 4 quarters was 12%, which is lower than the previous year's average of 15%. 3 young people received a custodial sentence in 2023/24, a decrease from 5 in the previous year, and again a significant decrease from 26 in 2018/19. This drop has moved us in line with our closest comparators.
- 6.29. Children looked after are seen at four weekly, six weekly or at 3 monthly intervals in accordance with their needs and placement stability.
- 6.30. All children looked after are independently reviewed every three, then six months all reviews are now held face to face.
- 6.31. Practitioner caseloads vary from an average of 11-14 children per worker for Children in Need, 17 per worker for Disabled Children, 10-11 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 14 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.
- 6.32. All allocated cases across Safeguarding and Family support are subject to supervision and management oversight at least monthly.

- 6.33. 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’ was performed in 2023. This 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:
- 6.34. Black and Mixed ethnicities are over-represented amongst children’s social care contacts and referrals compared to the Islington population of children.
- 6.35. A higher proportion of contacts from 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 Referrals from schools for abuse or neglect category, involving children and young people from Black ethnic group and also from “Other ethnicity” groups, are proportionally significantly higher compared to all referrals from schools for this category. 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’, trafficking, missing, UASC, physical abuse (adult on child), female genital mutilation (FGM) and at a lower significance level socially unacceptable behaviour.
 - It took on average around 150 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.
 - Children and young people from Mixed ethnic groups are more likely to come into the social care system repeatedly – and in the last 3 years had the highest average rate of re-referrals.
- 6.36. Following these findings and others, services are taking action to reduce the disproportionality this includes work with our partners and the findings were shared at an ISCP Away Day in June 2023.
- 6.37. 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.

- 6.38. The Motivational Practice model articulates a clear vision of good practice and sets out how practice quality should be measured against it. The child's databases are a system that allows us to collect and analyse a wide range of simple data, which over time allows us to track changes in demand and service delivery.
- 6.39. 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.
- 6.40. Twice a year, all senior managers across Children's Social Care and Early Help, including the DCS spend a week on the front-line observing practice and talking to social workers about the children, families, and carers they work with as well as the families directly. The aims of practice week are:
- Ensure Senior Managers understand what it is like for front line practitioners, walking in their shoes and gaining a deeper understanding of current frontline practice.
 - Improve visibility of Senior Managers and role modelling of use of the MSW practice model.
 - Assist in consistency of understanding and practice throughout the organisation.
 - Gather a deeper understanding of practice in relation to a particular theme.
- 6.41. All activities are tracked using a range of audit tools aligned to the Motivational Practice evaluation framework and incorporated into an overview report which is compiled by the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker for Children. The report is then discussed at Practice and Outcomes Boards to guide future audit and quality assurance activity. Recommendations from auditors in relation to case work, are added directly to the child's record and followed up within agreed timescales. Recommendations from the overview report are added to the QAF action plan and progressed.
- 6.42. We held two Practice Weeks, the first in May 2023 and second in November 2023. Children and families continued to report a consistently high quality of service, feeling listened to and supported with an understanding of the reasons for involvement. Practitioners were found to have a good understanding of the families they are working with and can assess risk and build relationships with a high level of skill. The social work practice continued to be well aligned with the Motivational Practice Model, with social workers and managers demonstrating a high level of professional skill and Trauma-informed practice training is still having a positive impact on workforce's understanding of children and young people who have experienced trauma.

- 6.43. May 2023 Practice week also included Targeted Early Help - Bright Start (BS) and Bright Futures (BF). The theme for this service was the identification of early risk factors for neglect and girls aged 12 years and older. Auditing looked at whether the impact of the earliest identification for help from a *universal* level (health visiting, schools, stay and play) was making a difference, looking at whether enough work was being carried out at those levels before stepping up to Targeted Services.
- 6.44. In Safeguarding and Family Support, data and performance information were indicating a rise in the number of female children aged between 12 and 15 years old entering care, which resulted in them becoming looked after within a relatively brief period. At the time of the audit, the numbers of children entering Care Proceedings had reduced by 50% in the previous year, which contributed to a working hypothesis that our social work teams were working with more children in the community under Child Protection Plans.
- 6.45. As part of May 2023 practice week, auditors reviewed the quality of those interventions as well as management decisions for all children, how risk was managed and the impact of good safety planning. Data (at the time) from the Access to Care and Resource Panel (ACRP) also showed requests to enter care proceedings, or permission to place children in care under section 20 accommodation were reducing, so auditing activity looked at the decision-making and the effectiveness of safety planning and risk management for these children.
- 6.46. For the November 2024 Practice Week in our Child in Need service, we focused on Child and Family Assessments that were out of timescales to help us understand what the impact of the delay were on children.
- 6.47. We also carried out smaller, targeted, audits on all cases where there has been a repeat child protection plan within the last two years, to understand how we could improve practice to ensure that children are not at risk of or suffer significant harm more than once.
- 6.48. At the front door we audited a sample of re-referrals that we received within the last month to understand how we can improve our response to children who were referred more than once in a short period of time.
- 6.49. In the service for children who are looked after, we specifically looked at the quality of practice around life-story work and permanency planning.
- 6.50. For older children in *Independent Futures*, auditors focussed on pathway planning and the quality of our work around EET and the impact of our practice on the outcomes of these young people. Kinship care, and particularly the quality of support

we offer to kinship carers was the focus of our auditing activity in the Fostering and Permanency teams.

6.51. The two Practice Weeks demonstrated that practice is purposeful, collaborative and services are delivered to a high standard. Most cases audited were graded as good or outstanding and direct observations and family feedback showed social workers and practitioners continue to work well with children and families.

6.52. **Quality Assurance Activity:**

The Safeguarding and Family Support Service and Young Islington Service also undertake a substantial number of 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. A wide range of quality assurance activities take place throughout the organisation. These remain focussed on improving outcomes for children and young people, and that information drawn from them leads to a deeper and more detailed focus on skills and behaviours that represent good practice.

A sample of the Auditing that took place in 2023/24:

6.53. **Timeliness of initial child protection conferences**

All initial child protection conferences should be convened within 15 working days of the strategy discussion, for this reporting period 73% of initial conferences (referred to as ICPC's) were held within this statutory timescale, this is a significant increase on the previous year where timeliness was 60%, this would demonstrate better planning and notifications from social work teams however we are continue to improve timeliness to avoid delay for families.

6.54. Some cause of delay for timeliness are school holidays preventing quoracy, and the availability of a key agency or parent. We actively encourage parents to attend conferences where possible and are working to improve the attendance of children to attend where appropriate to do so.

6.55. The Family Group Conference Service provide an advocacy service to assist and support children and their families in conference attendance and have supported 8 children and 18 parents in doing so.

6.56. Our performance timeliness for review conferences is significantly higher than for initial conferences, and for this reporting period our performance for review conferences was 98%.

6.57. **Summary of child protection activity**

New child protection plans have remained stable over the years.

Longer child protection plans have been kept to a minimum and these usually run in parallel with a legal process.

6.58. Percentage of repeat plans remains significant, including larger families with chronic problems. The percentage is affected by lower numbers of new child protection plans overall year with larger sibling groups.

6.59. Timeliness of ICPC's has improved with better planning and some schools being able to be present during holiday periods which has been helpful.

6.60. Where we have been able to gain feedback from parents, they tell us they mostly feel listened to and have expressed confidence in the chair in managing conferences.

6.61. **Repeat Child Protection Plans**

For this reporting period, 176 children were newly supported by a child protection plan of which 47 (26.7%) were a repeat plan.

6.62. 4 of these were repeats in Q4 and were 4 children from 2 families.

6.63. The audit reviewed those plans to explore if a repeat episode of CP planning was appropriate.

6.64. The audit showed that the percentage for this year had been affected by large sibling groups however throughout the year these figures had reduced bringing the overall percentage down.

6.65. Most repeat plans were after two years from the previous plan and despite efforts to manage need at a child in need basis, threshold was met for most repeats over the year.

6.66. Children suffering neglect is the major contributory factor for repeat plans. As an outcome of this audit a clear set of recommendations have been made which include reinforcing the need for practitioners to utilise the neglect toolkit, and for managers to continue to consult with Child Protection Coordinators prior to repeat Initial Child Protection Conferences for a discussion before escalating back to child protection.

6.67. **Youth Justice/Children's Social Care Joint Working Audit**

23 case files were audited jointly between the child protection and youth justice service to examine the quality of joint work. Recommendations included

standardisation of safety plans across both services, training workshops to be delivered on reducing criminalisation and adultification and strengthening the joint supervision practice to include services such as I-CAN.

6.68. **Late Initial Child Protection Conferences**

A total of 8 ICPC's for 21 children fell outside the 15-day timescale. They were late on average by 1 day due to availability of chairs during a brief period when staffing in the service was low. All these children were already supported through a Child in Need (CIN) plan so there is no evidence the delay in conference timeliness caused any additional risk.

6.69. **Black children and Section 47 enquiries.**

Section 47 enquiry of the 1989 Children Act requires local authorities to investigate children who may be at risk of significant harm, this is known as a child protection enquiry, or S47, and will determine what action should be taken to protect their welfare. We focused on how we meet the needs of Black British children who are suspected of suffering significant harm. We audited 34 children from 22 families and our findings were there was overall a good application of thresholds, good child and family participation with good identification of race and culture, however some improvements were needed in addressing EDI within our assessments.

6.70. **Audit of Section 47 enquiries**

In addition to the above audit which focused specifically on black children and Section 47 enquiries an additional audit of the quality of decision making was undertaken on Section 47 enquiries overall. A total of 25 Section 47's was audited which is a total of 31 children. The audit showed that the threshold for Section 47 enquiries was clear in 22 of these cases, with an area for development relating to practitioners needing to develop skills around ensuring we can evidence the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) for families within our practice.

6.71. **Persistent School Non-Attendance**

We audited 29 children. All assessments had a good understanding of reasons for poor school attendance and 62% of these children had a clear plan but there were some that needed improvement within this area.

6.72. EDI for White-British children required improvement to consider their experience of being over-represented in this group, particularly around disadvantage. Parental mental health is seen as a major barrier in school attendance. Recommendations included better engagement of fathers, better identification of young carers, to embed consultations with the Virtual School and joint training around planning and intervention.

6.73. Quality of decision making at our Access to Resources Panel

Decisions for children becoming looked after or for issuing proceedings should evidence a robust approach to decision making. Our Access to Resources Panel (ACRP) is the embedded mechanism within Children's Services to ensure the decision for a child to become looked after has been robustly reviewed and the panel will need to be fully satisfied that all options have been explored that includes whether support can be provided to allow children to remain safely at home.

6.74. To provide the assurances that decisions made at the ACRP are robust, this audit reviewed the decision making of the panel focusing on 32 children where the request for the child to become looked after either through a voluntary agreement or through progressing to court were not agreed to. The audit found that decisions made at the panel were proportionate and provided the means to consider safe and alternative approaches for children, The audit found no children were placed at risk arising from the decision-making process.

6.75. Young people aged 16-17 presented as homeless.

In April 2023 the Children's Commissioner requested information about the circumstances and treatment of children aged 16 and 17 who are accommodated by the Local Authority due to homelessness in the preceding year. The Service manager from the Independent Reviewing Officer Service undertook this audit. The audit looked at 31 children who had presented in that year as homeless and were aged 16 or 17 years old.

6.76. The audit highlighted there was consistent application of the Joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services to prevent homelessness of 16–17-year-old young people, and there was further work to be undertaken to ensure appropriate procedures are to be followed with all such cases to be presented to our Access to resources panel for decisions to accommodate with supporting management evidence on our electronic reporting systems.

6.77. Children and young people who have had repeat episodes of care.

The purpose of this audit was to explore the decision-making process and factors surrounding the children and young people who have been looked after by Islington and then re-entered care for this reporting period. The audit also explored the circumstances which led to the repeat episode of care and aimed to identify any themes that could be taken forward for any learning.

6.78. Between April 2023 and March 2024 there were 11 children and young people who have re-entered care of which 3 were males and the remaining 8 were females.

- 6.79. The findings from this audit showed an increase of 1 child from the previous year where 10 children re-entered care.
- 6.80. In all cases bar one, there is evidence of the decision being made at the right level in the organisation and rigorous ACRP scrutiny of all options needing to be considered prior to care being agreed.
- 6.81. The findings illustrate the complex families that the Local Authority is working with and the delicate balancing of decision making.
- 6.82. This audit recommended for the ACRP to continue to scrutinise all requests for care to ensure that all options have been thoroughly considered prior to care being agreed.

7. Contextual Safeguarding

- 7.1. Continued analysis undertaken 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, group offending, 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. For example, the 10 young people who went missing most frequently in 2023/24 had all been identified as at risk of exploitation at some point during the same year. 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:
- 7.3. **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 and exploitation coordinator, Intensive Specialist Prevention Worker and an

Exploitation and Missing intervention worker. The team expanded in 2021 to include the ASIP team who work with young people who are at risk of becoming looked after due to contextual risk.

- 7.4. **Specialist Social Workers:** All three social workers cover Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence, Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Missing. Their core day to day tasks is to deliver specialist consultations, chair complex strategy meetings and attend multiagency panels relating to exploitation and HSB.
- 7.5. **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.
- 7.6. **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.
- 7.7. The above teams also work closely with the local Police teams and the Community Safety Unit.
- 7.8. 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, ICAN daily 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), Islington Group Offending Partnership 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.

- 7.9. The Exploitation and Missing team deliver training in person on the topics of exploitation, serious youth violence and harmful sexual behaviour. This training is available to all professionals across the safeguarding board. Due to the complexity of the topic areas the E&M team have maintain the offer of full day and 2-day training. However, to reflect the ever-changing nature of the topic areas they have also designed and deliver shorter workshops through the year, some of the topics include adultification, online safety and pornography. The team also offer ad hoc training to various services across the borough that may request it including to Community Child Health, Concierge teams, Foster Carers, Designated Safeguarding leads, other local authorities as part of PIP and external partners. The Exploitation and Missing team deliver training in person on the topics of exploitation, serious youth violence and harmful sexual behaviour. This training is available to all professionals across the safeguarding board. The team also offer ad hoc training to various services across the borough that may request it including to Community Child Health, Concierge teams, Foster Carers, Designated Safeguarding leads, other local authorities as part of PIP and external partners.
- 7.10. 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.
- 7.11. 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. From April 2023 to March 2024 the total number of children missing from home and from care was 220, who were missing a total of 1136 times. This total includes 55 episodes of “Away from placement without authorisation”.
- 8.2. The number of children missing from care was 76 and missing from home was 144. Twenty-nine children were away from the placements without an authorisation.
- 8.3. The ten children who were missing most frequently were missing for 498 episodes which is a higher number than last year (443) but represents as similar proportion of all missing episodes (44%) across the service. The most frequently missing child in 2023-24 was Missing from Care or Away from Placement Without Authorisation 109 times within the year and this is compared to the most frequently missing child last year with 93 episodes.
- 8.4. *Less children have gone missing from care than last year, and the ten most frequent children account for as a much higher concentration of episodes for Missing from Care, but those ten children don't account for a higher percentage of the episodes across Missing from Care and Missing from Home because the overall episodes of MFH increased.*
- 8.5. In 2023-24, 124 children who were missing were female, 56%. 93 were male, 42% and 3 children were recorded as non-binary, transgender, or gender fluid, 1%.
- 8.6. The service noted a shift over the last three years of an increasing number of girls Missing from Home. This increase started in 2021-22 when girls made up 64% of the total number of children Missing from Home and 70% of episodes.
- 8.7. The overall number of girls who were missing has increased to 124 in 2023-24 (56%) from 101 in 2022-23 for 697 episodes (61%) from 470 (46%) last year. This represents 82 girls (57%). Missing from Home for 163 episodes (52%) and 44 girls Missing from Care (58%) for 501 episodes (65%) which is up from 336 episodes (44%) last year.
- 8.8. The data for 2023-24 shows that in addition to a higher proportion of girls, girls were missing more often with average frequency of 5-6 episodes per girl. The duration of missing episodes for girls is generally shorter than for boys, with 69% of girls returning within 24 hours and 86% of girls returning within 48 hours. No girls were missing for more than one month, although two girls were Away from Placement Without Authorisation for over a month, but their whereabouts were known.
- 8.9. Overall, the number of boys who were missing remains the same at 93, but data for 2023-24 shows a significant decrease in boys Missing from Care from 39 to 30. This is most evidenced in the number of missing episodes for boys looked-after, which

has decreased hugely by 38% from 420 to 261. The average frequency for boys across the service in 2023-24 is 4.6 episodes per boy. Duration of missing is generally longer for boys than for girls, with 53% of boys returning within 24 hours and 74% returning within 48 hours.

- 8.10. There were 29 young people recorded AFPWA over 55 episodes, which includes 24 of these young people also reported Missing from Care throughout the year. Senior Management continue to have oversight of children who are Away from Placement via Missing Briefings which are submitted weekly, regardless of if a child is missing or AFPWA, and particular attention is paid to repeat episodes. The number of AFPWA episodes has been reduced year on year from 127 in 2020-21 due to improved awareness and understanding of the use of “Away from Placement” and improved oversight by Managers and the Exploitation & Missing Team which monitors all episodes of AFPWA.
- 8.11. In 2023-24 the ages of children who are missing, and the number of episodes, are spread more evenly across the ages from 13 – 17. In previous years the majority of children and episodes were for ages 16-17, however this group has reduced from 59% of episodes last year to 40% in 2023-24. There has been a corresponding increase in missing episodes for 13, 14 and 15-year-olds from 354 last year to 613 this year. The shifts in missing episodes across age groups is partly a demographic situation where the children who are missing most frequently have continued to do so in the next age group, however the spread of unique children shows a significant increase in younger children going missing. 107 children aged 13-15 were missing in 2023-24, this compares with 83 children last year, 57 children in 2021-22 and 54 children in 2020-21.
- 8.12. The over-representation of missing Black children and children who have Mixed Parentage, is something that is being actively considered through our robust work with children and their families to address disproportionality. In 2023-24, the overall number of children from these groups has increased slightly throughout the year to 106 from 102 children. Although there is a slight increase, these groups make up 48% of overall children compared to 52% last year, the number of episodes has decreased from 670 to 667. In CLA the number of Black children or children with Mixed Parentage continued to decrease to 43 (57%) with a reduced number of episodes to 507 (66%).
- 8.13. It is particularly the data around ethnicity where we see the impact of a small number of children accounting for such large amounts of the missing episodes. When we take into consideration that 10 children accounted for 63% of all missing from care episodes, we can see how the ethnicity of those 10 children can affect the overall picture and analysis of data. Children who are Black or Mixed parentage make up seven of the ten most frequently missing children in 2023-24, all of whom are

Children Looked-After. This is similar to 2022-23 where 8 children were from Black or Mixed parentage.

- 8.14. There were more short missing episodes this year with 63% of episodes where children returned within 24 hours, and 81% of children returned within 48 hours. The percentage of short missing episodes was lower last year, with 53% returning within 24 hours and 75% within 48 hours. Five children were missing or away from placement for over one month, including, one child missing from care, one child missing from home and three children where their whereabouts were known and were away from placement without authorisation.
- 8.15. 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/I-CAN search stream document meaning if they are missing it will be monitored in discussions with IGT/I-CAN Exploitation and Missing team and gangs police team.
- 8.16. Each missing police report is quality assured by the Exploitation and Missing Team, this process means any practice issues is immediately escalated, any early indicators of exploitation mentioned in the report can be addressed immediately, and 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.
- 8.17. **Return Home Interviews (RHI's)**
- A return home interview is automatically triggered when a young person returns from a missing episode. 50% of all RHI's are completed within 72 hours of the missing episode being closed on the system. The team is always trying to improve this percentage however take the approach of not closing down RHI's immediately if they are finding it difficult to contact the child. Several attempts are made over several days meaning that at times there can be several RHI's open for the same child. When a child does not want to engage in the RHI process the person attempting the RHI will offer some advice and guidance around working with frequently missing young people.
- 8.18. A pattern for the last few years has been that the 10 children who go missing most frequently account for about 50% of the missing episodes. Due to the frequency of the missing episodes, it is often difficult to complete an RHI due to the young person

being missing again when attempts are made. In 2023 – 24, 30% of RHI were not possible because the child had gone missing again and was missing when the RHI was attempted. The network around the children, who are missing most frequently, are aware of the difficulties of completing RHI's and are all aware to explore any missing episodes with the child whenever they have contact with them.

- 8.19. In 2023/24 30% of RHI attempted were completed successfully which is an increase from 20% in 2022/23. 5% of the RHI were not possible because the child declined verbally or via text and 35% of them were not possible because the child did not respond to the multiple calls and messages offering the RHI. If a child does not want to engage with the RHI process the person undertaking the task will aim to explore the missing episode with the parent, carer or placement to explore if there is any additional support needed.
- 8.20. Analysis of the data shows the RHI are equally successful for children who are Looked After and children who are not.
- 8.21. **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).
- 8.22. 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. Refresher training has been provided to schools. There has been an improvement in the quality of referrals made and more comprehensive enquiries made by schools before referring cases to the LA. We hold our data by academic year in line with educational activity for children of compulsory school age. For the academic year 2023/24, there were 18 Missing Pupil Alerts received by Pupil Services.
- 8.23. 9 children (50%) were found and returned to school, while 7 (39%) had an unknown location – the highest figure since 2021/22. At the time of writing, 2 (11%) cases are currently open and under investigation.

- 8.24. The number of successful investigations has dipped significantly this year with the lowest proportion of children being found and returned to education over a nine-year period. The reasons for this are unclear, although it is worth noting that the number of referrals made to the LA is the lowest on record which suggests that schools are acting earlier and achieving success with the more straightforward cases and only referring cases that have become 'stuck' due to parental non-engagement. Local authority officers have also found it more difficult to confirm school destinations this academic year with the highest proportion of 'whereabouts unknown' since 2015/16 despite access to national data sources (e.g. DfE 'Find information about pupils' and HMRC). The names of any children whose school destination is not found are added to the DfE's 'Lost Pupil' database available on 'School 2 School' (known as 's2s') where LAs can search for new children should they appear in their area.

9. Child Exploitation and Group Offending

9.1. Contextual Safeguarding

In the year 2023/24 130 children, who were open to Islington Children Social Care, were identified as being at risk of child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation or at risk of being affected by serious youth violence. The age of young people spanned from 10 to 17. While some young adults, open to leaving care services, were also vulnerable to exploitation, the same marker system is not used to identify them. In these cases, the team working with the young adult would have still been supported by the Exploitation and Missing team, alongside team such as VAWG, ICAN and ABIANDA.

The 130 children identified as at risk of exploitation were made up of 62 females, 67 males and one young person who identified as being transgender.

- 9.2. Throughout the year one child could have had multiple exploitation markers on their file at different points during the year. If there are concerns a child who is opened to Islington Children Social Care is at risk of contextual harm a risk assessment is completed and the appropriate risk level marker opened on file. This risk level can increase and decrease as the year goes on. Level 1 indicates the child is additionally vulnerable to exploitation, level 2 means there is evidence the child has been exploited or involved in serious youth violence and level 3 means that the exploitation is habitual, and an immediate safeguarding plan needs to be implemented to reduce the risk.

- 9.3. During 2023/24 62 children were identified as at risk of child sexual exploitation, 70 children at risk of child criminal exploitation and 61 children at risk of being affected by serious youth violence (this could include a child that was at risk of being hurt or hurting someone else).

The marker system

9.4.6 more children were assigned a level 3 marker this year compared with the previous year. A level 3 risk marker was assigned to 4 girls due to CSE concerns, 4 boys due to CCE concerns and 9 boys due to concerns of SYV. 7 children had both a CSE and CCE marker, 44 children had a CCE and SYV marker and 4 children had all three at some point during the year. The strong correlation between child criminal exploitation and young people effected by serious youth violence is something the partnership has focused on and in collaboration with the police have established systems, so all children considered to be involved in group offending activity (gangs) are always assigned an exploitation officers before being overseen by the gang's police. This year there was a reduction in the number of young people identified as being at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation combined, 15 last year and 7 this year. In 2023/24 there has been an increase in concerns around girls being sexually exploited and involved in violent incidents in the community but within children social care we have seen less of a correlation between the girls who are at risk of being sexually exploited and criminally exploited, this year.

Practice in respect of exploitation and serious youth violence.

- 9.5. Strategy meetings are attended by the partnership, including, police, health and education and any other services involved with the family such as I-CAN, housing and probation etc. A multi-agency approach is agreed at the strategy meeting in order to safeguard the young person at risk of exploitation and/or serious youth violence. If a child has been a victim of SYV and are in hospital, the strategy meeting is held with 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.
- 9.6. The exploitation and missing team have continued to use the knowledge and intel gathered in consultations and strategy meetings to positively affect work across the borough. In practice this looks like having very good working relationships with the community safety teams and attending their hotspot meetings and working alongside BTP, local police, the NCA and neighbouring boroughs to address organised crime groups functioning in and around the large transport hubs in the

borough. The Training package developed for social workers and the partnerships is developing to meet the needs of the service. Currently on offer is a two full day training on exploitation and serious youth violence, a 2 full day training on sexualised behaviour and then multiple online workshops focussing on topics such as pornography, social media and adultification. Bespoke training packages for foster carers, concierges and police, for example, are also designed and delivered throughout the year.

9.7. **Modern Slavery/Trafficking**

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

- 9.8. 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).
- 9.9. Since January 2021 Islington and Camden Social Care have been part of a pilot project with the Home Office. The pilot, which is still running, 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.
- 9.10. There has been an increase in referrals and an increase in referrals for female victims, as well as high risk safeguarding cases. The panel continue to see a greater variety in referrals, discussions and evidence provided. The panel have also noted links between the referrals for child victims and that the same individuals/groups are being named as suspected exploiters. This has enabled greater analysis of wider concerns and further discussions about disruption. Such trends are fed back to MACE in both Local Authorities and the Modern Slavery Board in Islington.

- 9.11. The quality of referrals has improved, and the assisting evidence produced by professionals around the child has been extremely useful and has sped up decisions. The SCA has repeatedly commended Islington and Camden on the quality of the NRM panel and the decision making. For many of the referrals heard at panel there has been immediate follow up with relevant agency partners to ensure that the child is safeguarded. Between April 2023 and March 2024 65 young people were allocated to the panel however, one young person was withdrawn by the SCA as there was an age dispute. The 64 young people discussed at the panel were open to Islington or Camden Children Social Care. 56 of the referrals were for males and 9 for females. There were 4 children aged between 11 and 13, 11 children were 14-year-old, 17 were 15 years old, 19 were 16 years old and 15 were 17. This age break down is what we would expect to see as the evidence is often based on police reports after arrests. Throughout the year 7 USAC children were referred for an NRM and 7 referrals were for children who had previously been referred to the panel regarding a different incident of exploitation.
- 9.12. The analysis shows us that 46 minor children were victims of CCE, 6 children were victims of CSE, children were victims of forced labour and in 4 cases the exploitation type was unknown.
- 9.13. Staff are offered training and consultations throughout the year on exploitation, trafficking and the NRM process. A focus this year has been how to support first responders to identify trafficking when the predominate issue is sexual exploitation and then how to evidence that sufficiently in an NRM referral as this can be quite complex. The Panel members have challenged the SCA on decisions around sexual exploitation cases and used their expertise to evidence and defend decisions.

10. Implications

10.1. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

10.2. Legal Implications

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.

- 10.3. The Children and Social Work Act 2017, (CSWA 2017), sets out how agencies must work together by placing new duties on the police, clinical commissioning groups and the Local Authority to make arrangements to work together and with other partners locally to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in need within their area.
- 10.4. The Council must have regard to the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 which replaces Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023).
- 10.5. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England)(amendment) Regulations 2021 place further duties on Councils with regard to looked after children.
- 10.6. **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

None

11. Resident Impact Assessment:

- 11.1. 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.
- 11.2. 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.

- 11.3. 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.
- 11.4. Our priorities for the coming year will address continued work prevent children coming into care and the implementation of the National Reforms, strengthening multi-agency Early Help system bringing together family hubs and the existing Early help systems, changes to the MASA arrangements an designing our approach to family help and child protection which will see us embark on a review of children’s services to ensure we are best placed to meet the new reform ambitions

12. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 12.1. 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

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Jon Abbey

Director of Children’s Services

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