

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services London Borough of Redbridge

Inspection dates 18 – 29 January 2010
Reporting inspector Brendan Parkinson

Age group: All

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.

2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- discussions with 47 children and young people receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.
- analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the children and young people's plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision, and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2006.
- a review of 53 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
- the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment arrangements undertaken in June 2009.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements
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Service information

4. Redbridge has 65,267 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing nearly 25.7% of the total population of the borough. In January 2009, 74.4% of the school population was classified as belonging to a black or minority ethnic group compared to 21.3% in England overall; 53.3% of pupils speak English as an additional language. Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Somali and Tamil are the most commonly spoken community languages in the borough. Some 7.9% of pupils are of Black African background. Redbridge has 76 schools comprising 52 primary schools, 17 secondary schools, four special schools and three pupil referral units. The Redbridge Children and Families Trust was established in 2004. The Trust includes staff of NHS Redbridge Primary Care Trust (PCT), Community Health staff and the local authority. The associated Partnership Board has a wide range of representation, including education, children's social care, police and the voluntary sector. The Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board became independently chaired in February 2006 and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in Redbridge that deliver safeguarding services.

5. Community-based services are provided by one central child protection and assessment service (CPAT), comprising one screening and three assessment teams. Assessments also take place in the two children with disabilities teams. Three children's resource centre teams provide services for children, including for children receiving short term looked after services, children with protection plans, and other child in need plans. Social care services for children have 60 foster carers and one children's home, as well as the Indigo Project which provides respite care for children and young people with disabilities. Three teams provide support for looked after children and the local authority also operates a fostering team and an adoption team. Other family support services are delivered by 14 children's centres.

6. At the time of the inspection there were 224 looked after children. They comprise 52 children under five years of age, 120 children of school age (five to 16), and 52 post-16. A total of 135 young people and adults currently have care leaver status. Of the young people and adults with care leaver status, 60 are from Asian or African ethnic backgrounds. Redbridge uses a headteacher of the Virtual School as its approach to support the education of looked after children.

7. Commissioning of NHS and primary care is carried out by NHS Redbridge. Acute hospital services are provided by Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust and the Whipps Cross University Hospitals NHS Trust. Adult and child mental health services are provided by the North East London NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

8. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in the area is adequate. The Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board actively promotes awareness of safeguarding in the area and provides positive leadership on safeguarding matters. The Board is well supported by key partner agencies. Targets set are appropriate, with performance management arrangements currently being strengthened by additional investment in a quality assurance function. Access to, and take up of, inter-agency training are in place, including appropriate provision for the voluntary sector. Links between the Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board and the Redbridge Children's Trust Partnership Board are effective. Many children have been supported well through the preventative strategies implemented by the Early Recognition and Identification of Children Panel and Targeted Youth Meeting, with arrangements planned to align this work further with the common assessment framework (CAF). This was in progress at the time of the inspection.

9. The immediate safeguarding and child protection needs of individual children have more recently been addressed in a timely way. Quality assurance and performance management systems are currently in place and are effective, although further development is required to ensure they become more firmly established within the duties delegated to the Children's Trust. Some recent improvements in the quality and content of case recording for those most in need of protection are evident. There are, however, a number of children in need whose assessments have been incomplete, insufficient or absent during a period prior to the summer of 2009 since which time performance has shown improvement. Further work on these cases is required as an immediate priority to ensure that the circumstances and needs of these children are known and understood and that services for them are delivered effectively. This situation is acknowledged by senior managers in the area as needing remedial action. Senior managers also recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that recorded work reflects accurately the work undertaken, reports children's views, includes chronologies, and outlines clear, achievable plans.

10. Partnership working between the agencies is adequate. The Children's Trust agreement includes an extensive and well-used commissioned range of services. However partnerships with those with responsibilities for the commissioning and delivery of local housing services are inadequate and need rapid improvement in order to secure progress for young people and young adults.

11. Communication between professionals is adequate, although transfer arrangements between social care teams within the Trust are under-developed

resulting in delays in the provision of some services to support children and young people living at home with their parents.

12. Support, guidance and direction for staff are adequate in most parts of children's social care. Strategic and operational managers have achieved some success in tackling significant workforce difficulties. A development plan is in place that focuses on key issues such as recruitment, retention and staff development. However, the area has yet to achieve a sufficiently stable and experienced social care workforce to ensure the delivery of a consistently improving quality of service. All child protection cases are suitably allocated and reviewed, although workloads are high, particularly in the child protection and assessment team. The oversight of casework by operational managers is under-developed and does not currently include sufficient challenge by the independent reviewing officer service. Some children have not benefited from sufficiently focused or sustained delivery of plans, particularly those whose needs lie outside of a formal child protection plan. Some plans are insufficiently specific about the desired outcomes, although others are clear and appropriate. The quality of social care case recording is variable. It is generally good where children's circumstances require a child protection response. The local authority acknowledges that improvement is needed and that the difficulties are compounded by the implementation of the local integrated children's system.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

13. Safeguarding services in Redbridge have an adequate capacity for improvement. There is a good range of mature inter-agency and inter-disciplinary relationships which support and deliver coordinated services to children with safeguarding needs. Senior managers exhibit an ambition and drive for improvement in safeguarding. However, there is insufficient attention at some operational managerial levels in the Children's Trust to quality assurance and on sustaining the focus and pace of plans, and ensuring that workloads are manageable. While the area is yet to achieve a track record of sustained improvement in safeguarding, recent, substantial and secure improvements provide a firm platform to support this. Difficulties in sustaining good performance are recognised in appropriate development plans which are resulting in significant improvement in areas of service, for example within the child protection and assessment team. The implementation of the recent integrated children's system has had a negative impact on performance and performance reporting.

14. The workforce is sufficiently qualified and displays a strong commitment to safeguarding. It is, however, insufficiently experienced and stable overall, and the take-up of safeguarding training among health partners is variable. Political and senior management leadership for the Children's Trust is responsive to the impact of the significant increase in demand and substantial new investment has already been made with an even greater level of increase in base budget planned from April 2010. The resources allocated, including the additional resources allocated to baseline budgets, are sufficient to meet current

demands. Rapid changes in the Redbridge demographic profile and the consequent impact on the demand for services are likely to be key to the capacity to ensure sustained improvement. Senior managers assess appropriately that yet further capacity will be required to meet these future demands. Heightened levels of social and economic deprivation have become some of the greatest challenges for the area.

15. Progress is being made in the continued development of prevention and early intervention services in support of vulnerable children. The area has developed its own approach prior to the required implementation of the CAF. While more needs to be done to gain the views of service users on an individual basis, there are good examples of efforts to gather views on specific issues, with service changes taking place as a consequence. Agreed thresholds for children in greatest need and the linked referral and assessment processes are generally understood by professionals in key partner agencies, although the take-up of the CAF for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in North East London Foundation Trust is not yet secure. Thresholds to determine if a core assessment is required are not clear and are currently inadequate. Further work is required to ensure that core assessments are undertaken only where children's circumstances are complex and service plans should be informed by these. Whilst the three prevention arrangements; the Early Recognition and Identification of Children Panel, Targeted Youth Meeting and the CAF are adequate further work is required to ensure that they work together more closely and effectively.

Areas for improvement

16. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in the London Borough of Redbridge, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- Ensure that the current needs of, and services for, children in need who do not have protection or care plans, are reassessed, with effective plans and services put in place, particularly in relation to those children subject to chronic, or serially acute, episodes where the parenting they receive negatively affects their proper development or where they are subject to periodic emotional or neglectful behaviours
- Review the capacity of the Child Protection and Assessment Team to ensure consistently high quality assessments of need are undertaken. Similarly, tackle capacity issues within other social care teams in order to ensure that timely, high quality interventions are delivered to children and their families.

- Ensure that all child protection enquiries and assessments are only undertaken by staff who are qualified and also sufficiently experienced.

Within three months:

- Ensure the effective operation, monitoring and timely transfer of work between the social care teams within the Children's Trust.
- Improve further the threshold for and timeliness of completion of core assessments for all children in need.
- Improve managerial professional guidance and direction to staff on casework matters, ensuring that plans are focused on appropriate outcomes and pursued within timescales necessary for children to be safeguarded.
- Ensure that arrangements for the assessment, planning, service delivery and review of all children in need are secured, leaving no gap across the spectrum of provision from early intervention to those with a child protection plan.
- Develop clear care pathways for children with complex health needs, ensuring integrated and timely delivery of specialist services.
- Strengthen safeguarding training and commitment within health partner provider services.

Within six months:

- Improve the extent to which children's views in relation to their circumstances, wishes and feelings are secured and influence plans.
- Develop arrangements for the continuous quality assurance of work undertaken with the focus on improving the consistency of service delivery to children and their families.
- Develop and implement a medium-term capacity development plan to ensure that the emerging needs of Redbridge's child population are known and able to be met.
- Complete the transition to electronic social care records, ensuring that the system is functional in all parts of the service and that it is able to produce essential management information.
- Extend commissioning between the Children's Trust, the housing authority and the main providers within the area to ensure safe accommodation with appropriate support to vulnerable families is improved and extended.

Outcomes for children and young people

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe Grade 3 (adequate)

17. Children most clearly in need of protection and safeguarding are identified with timely and appropriate responses given. Awareness of safeguarding issues is at least adequate in all settings. Safeguarding is judged to be at least adequate in service and institutional settings, with the exception of private fostering, where effective action has been taken to remedy the deficiencies found in the last inspection in 2009. The safeguarding needs of most children are assessed effectively, although some examples of poor practice have been seen in relation to children arriving in the area from other areas where they have child protection plans in place. Procedures to deal with children missing from school are good, and children excluded from school or at risk of exclusion are quickly placed in other educational settings. The infant mortality rate is worse than the national average despite a 14% improvement in the last six years. The rate of teenage pregnancies is lower than the national average, although this has remained unchanged for four years. For children and young people with the highest levels of risk, work is undertaken to keep them safe in accordance with child protection procedures. However, this does not consistently apply to children with lower levels of need who had been referred through the child protection and assessment team, many of whom wait too long for assessments and interventions.

18. The Local Safeguarding Children Board, with a diverse and inclusive membership, provides good leadership on child protection and broader safeguarding issues and contributes to the development of safer services in Redbridge. The quality assurance subgroup of the Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board is a recent development that is yet to make an impact on the quality of work in this area. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place in health trusts and reflect Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board's guidance, with evidence of regular reviews of risks to children and young people. Health inequalities in Redbridge are acknowledged as a continuing area for improvement for NHS Redbridge and its partners. Arrangements to safeguard children within health settings are satisfactory, but the provision for undertaking child protection medicals within the King George Hospital paediatric accident and emergency department is not suitable for children who may be distressed and have to wait in a busy public environment.

19. Staff recruitment and vetting processes across partner agencies accord with current guidance and regulations and are appropriately implemented. The Local Authority Designated Officer service works well, benefiting from close links with the Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board. Some good practice was noted around effective and sensitive handling of disciplinary matters.

Safeguarding training for staff within health partners has been variable, with good coverage in North East London Foundation Trust amongst CAMHS staff and adequate training for accident and emergency staff. An audit had revealed relatively poor take-up amongst General Practitioner (GP) practices with only 65% having received basic level 1 training; this is being addressed by the designated nurse. Contractual arrangements are being put in place for pharmacists and dental practitioners setting out the expected take-up levels of training. The PCT Board has a good system in place for monitoring training take-up across its commissioned services.

20. With regard to children subject to arrest for criminal offences, there are arrangements in place out of hours for the duty social worker to undertake risk assessments of those who are unable to be bailed to their home. However, it is acknowledged that few, if any, are subsequently transferred to local authority accommodation.

21. The accident and emergency department of the King George Hospital has good arrangements in place for tracking and alerting frequent attendees and looked after children who attend for substance misuse or self harm. There is an effective flagging system to notify if an attendee is the subject to a child protection plan.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 3 (adequate)

22. The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe is adequate. Surveys of children looked after and care leavers by the Children's Trust and Ofsted indicate that the majority of children feel safe in their home environments and in school; most know where to access help and advice if they need it. Some children and young people did not feel safe on public transport, leading to the police putting effective measures in place to respond to this. Although the views of children are described as being obtained and taken into account in informing assessments and plans, this is not always sufficiently evidenced in case files.

23. A number of initiatives take place within universal and targeted services to consult children and young people, including how safe they feel in a range of settings. Substantial efforts are made to gather the views of children and young people which then influence the plans and services. Of particular note are the work by the Aiming High participation officer with disabled children and that of the North East London Foundation Trust in consulting children, young people and parents in relation to improving CAMHS. Consultation with children and young people from different ethnic minority groups about services is good. Effective work with a group of Roma children supports the safeguarding needs of this vulnerable group. Youth crime and anti-social behaviour strategies are also being effectively targeted and are focused on ensuring that children's safeguarding and protective needs are given a high priority. Considerable multi-agency efforts are made to identify and respond to the safeguarding needs of

children suffering the effects of domestic violence. Effective work is undertaken to ensure safe accommodation and support services are provided when needed.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

24. Clear and agreed thresholds for access to safeguarding services are in place and are understood and implemented by key partner agencies and professionals. Currently, the initial response to contacts and referrals made to the Trust is adequate. However, some children and young people who are not at risk of significant harm but requiring a service to help support them have to wait too long for an assessment of their needs to be completed. Many recent assessments demonstrate the involvement of children and their parents or carers more effectively than in previous cases. The Trust has recognised and accepted that some work is inadequate; it has identified resources to deal with this deficit and demonstrates a commitment to remedy the problem within an appropriate timescale. The arrangements for recording and investigation of complaints are clear and timely in almost all circumstances, with clear reasons identified where delays take place.

25. Children with the highest levels of need and risk receive a service with up to date plans which are regularly reviewed. However, too many plans are insufficiently clear, specific or focused. Some cases were found where there was evidence of a drift in planning and child protection plans had been allowed to continue without evidence that the interventions were making a significant improvement to the child's assessed needs. Record-keeping is inconsistent, with some examples of high quality paper and electronic files, but others where recording is inadequate. Modifications to the Integrated Children's System computerised recording arrangements are in progress but are yet to have an impact on recording practices. There is close monitoring of health records for children with child protection plans, leading to improvement in the quality of those records.

26. Child protection enquiries are currently conducted in a timely way by qualified social workers, some of whom are suitably experienced. While some more recently qualified social workers undertake enquiries and assessments, they do so under the guidance and direction of the team manager supported by a senior practitioner as appropriate. Findings in relation to significant harm are clear and action to ensure the safety of children is implemented to a satisfactory standard. Enquiries and assessments are supported by contributions from the key partner agencies. There is evidence of adequate managerial oversight and involvement in cases in the child protection system. Most children receiving a service are allocated to a suitably qualified worker who visits regularly, although recording is not always clear that children have been seen alone.

27. Care pathways for children with disabilities are insufficiently clear to parents and the CAF is not as fully embedded as it should be. Capacity difficulties in the health visiting service have adversely impacted on the

implementation of the CAF and rollout of the Healthy Child Programme. The action plan in place combined with additional staffing currently provides improved support for these developments. However, as a result not all families are accessing services in the integrated way envisaged by the Trust. Staff confirm that there are lengthy waiting lists to gain access to medical services at the Child Development Centre, particularly occupational therapy, physiotherapy and specialist speech and language therapy. Reviews of services, such as the wheelchair and equipment service, are yet to have an impact on improving outcomes for children. Access to short break provision is variable and the thresholds for this are unclear to some parents. The Aiming High project has identified a range of additional provision and has started extending the range and availability of short breaks opportunities.

28. Schools and partner agencies communicate effectively about children; this is particularly apparent within the children's resource centres and in the pilot projects to attach social workers and CAMHS workers to schools. Responses to referrals by schools to the Child protection and assessment service are reported to have improved significantly in recent months and the local authority designated officer arrangements for schools are highly regarded. The Targeted Youth Meeting and Early Recognition and Identification of Children Panels provide a speedy response for many children in need and enable a variety of flexible interventions for families aimed at preventing the need for child protection or looked after services. However, children and parents are not directly involved in panel discussions. Children's centres make a significant contribution to supporting families in the community and helping children with additional needs. Active partnerships across the key partner agencies and with the diverse community and voluntary sector in Redbridge result in the achievement of positive outcomes for some children who require help to support them living at home.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

29. Information sharing protocols are well established with evidence of regular and appropriate exchange of information. The multi-agency nature of the Children's Trust and the multi-disciplinary working arrangements in the children's resource centres support this. The local authority and the Children's Trust provide clear leadership on safeguarding issues and key partners are actively engaged. Safeguarding policies and strategies are appropriate, complying with statutory requirements and benefiting from inclusion within the Pan-London child protection arrangements. Staffing and resource capacity is currently insufficient to meet the needs of the service overall. These deficits are well understood by senior managers and political commitment is in place to tackle these. Some additional resource has been made available. It is acknowledged that further capacity will be needed to meet the identified service deficits.

30. The culture of performance management within the Children's Trust is not matched by improved performance in front line services. The Trust's

performance on key indicators has varied considerably over the last two years; with a few exceptions, performance is currently in line with its statistical neighbours. Reinforced lines of accountability and more robust quality assurance mechanisms are now more effective in delivering improved outcomes for children. The impact of these on performance and outcomes for children remained inconsistent up until the inspection period. Safe recruitment processes comply with statutory requirements. The poor organisation of some current paper human resource files should benefit from the full implementation of electronic files. Staff across key disciplines report positively on improved access to management advice, support and supervision, with good opportunities for training and development. Social worker supervision takes place at appropriate intervals and is prioritised by staff and their managers. Open access consultation is also often a feature within teams. Staff from a range of professional disciplines were able to describe some learning from the two recent serious case reviews

31. Children, parents and carers are involved in child protection planning processes, reporting that they are treated with dignity and respect. Young people are consulted well on general issues relating to services. However, recording of their individual views is not consistent, nor is there sufficient evidence of impact on decision making. Partners fulfil their statutory duties to cooperate, with links between the Trust and the police a noted strength, and those demonstrated by the multi-agency public protection arrangements. Partnerships between schools and other agencies are in place to identify needs and implement strategies for delivery for children. The Children's Trust also has adequate arrangements to monitor its commissioned services in ensuring service delivery to quality standards.

32. The workforce plan is ensuring that the staff profile reflects, as far as is reasonable, the range of communities in Redbridge. The Redbridge Safeguarding Children Board is diverse and well informed about community needs. Steps taken to promote equality and diversity are regarded highly in survey work undertaken on behalf of the Trust. Service design takes account of the needs of ethnic minority families. Work to identify and meet the needs of children in vulnerable families living in temporary accommodation is an outstanding feature demonstrating the commitment of partner agencies. A range of universal and targeted services supports the increasing range of ethnic groups in the area, demonstrating impact in improved engagement by those communities with services. Although some case files display awareness of cultural needs and identify steps taken to ensure these are addressed, ethnicity has not been consistently or systematically recorded on electronic files.

33. Resource allocation reflects the Trust's priorities and supports the delivery of statutory responsibilities, with resources allocated to work that is most likely to achieve improved outcomes for children. It is recognised that additional targeted resources have been needed for some time and will continue to be needed in the future. Contracting arrangements are effective in achieving best use of resources.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

34. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and care leavers is adequate. Progress towards appropriate targets across a range of national indicators is being made, particularly in relation to health and educational outcomes for most looked after children. Statutory requirements are met, although until very recently this has been inconsistent. A track record of improvement in service quality is yet to be firmly established across key objectives, although some aspects are clearly improving, for example, the first time offending rates of looked after children. There are some examples of good provision and appropriate professional relationships, particularly in promoting achievement and meeting the health care needs of this group of children.

35. The local authority and its partner agencies acknowledge the need for a full analysis of the rapid, sustained increase in the number of children becoming looked after and for a consequent action plan. Decision making around the use of the Public Law Outline is becoming more effective but improvements need to be more embedded to improve managerial confidence in decision making where intervention through the family court is indicated. Corporate parenting is yet to be fully established and strongly promoted amongst elected members and requires additional sustained commitment. At a practice level, plans for looked after children and their impact on outcomes are reviewed in a timely way, although there is insufficient challenge and ambition on behalf of children. The levels, timeliness and quality of case recording are inconsistent with a large minority being unsatisfactory. Children and young people looked after have good opportunities through a number of events and surveys to contribute to service improvement. Training opportunities for key professionals and carers are accessible and valued. Foster carers make particular comment on the active support they receive, as well as the recent improvements planned to address differential rates of financial support between Redbridge and neighbouring areas. Partnerships between the key agencies and professions within the Trust are at least adequate, benefiting from the framework provided by the Trust.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

36. The partnerships within the area have an adequate capacity for improvement. Acceptance and promotion of corporate responsibility for looked after children are evident, but more needs to be done to strengthen the championing of the ambitions for, and commitments to, this group of children and young people. The Children's Trust oversees and reports on performance monitoring to the Partnership Board. However, the Board should substantially strengthen its focus on addressing gaps in specific services and outcomes. This is recognised within the Partnership Board and there are active plans to address

the need for 'closing the gap' in some areas, for example, educational achievement at key stage four. Older looked after children do not yet have access to a sufficient and wide range of safe accommodation that best meets their needs.

37. Sufficient progress has yet to be made in ensuring sustained improvement in looked after services. The Children's Trust does not have a shared understanding of, and appropriate thresholds for, children and young people who are most likely to need looked after services. More effective approaches are required in developing and implementing individual care plans within timescales appropriate for the children involved. This is particularly relevant for those children who are subject to parenting which is, periodically, not 'good enough', or for those who are subject to persistent lower levels of emotional harm or neglect. Care plans are not always progressed in a timely and sustained way, mindful of the importance provided by consistency, continuity and effective professional relationships for these children. The social care workforce in this part of the Trust's services is relatively stable and workloads are manageable.

Areas for improvement

38. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in the London Borough of Redbridge, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- Strengthen the challenge provided by the independent planning and reviewing service and operational managers to ensure that the plans for children who remain in care for over four months are progressed in a timely way.

Within three months:

- Strengthen the contribution from all elected members as corporate parents in providing positive engagement and ambition for children in public care.
- Improve the quality and timeliness of case recording, ensuring that children are seen on their own, their views ascertained and that there is a clear link to their care plans.
- Fully implement robust recording arrangements for legal advice and instructions produced within the framework of the Public Law Outline.

Within six months:

- Evaluate current data and projected need, and develop plans, including resource requirements, to understand and meet the current and anticipated future demand for looked after and leaving care services within the local authority area.

Outcomes for children and young people

39. Health provision for looked after children is adequate overall with some good features. The named doctor undertakes initial health assessments for newly looked after children who are under five and for those with complex needs. Otherwise, initial assessments are undertaken by the child's or foster carer's own GPs, although there is no evidence of specific training to support this. The named doctor has commenced reviewing all these assessments. The timeliness and quality of ongoing health checks are good and the named nurse and health visitors work closely with school-based staff and pre-school units to ensure appropriate standards are maintained. While initial health plans are in place, not all case files show that they routinely inform planning overall. There is a fast track access to the CAMHS services, with the named nurse and a specialist CAMHS worker co-located in the Children Looked After Away From Home Team. A participation officer works to extend opportunities for young people to take up positive activities but resources within the borough are limited and wider partnerships to strengthen provision and promote take-up are not yet fully in place. Collaborative working has ensured sex and relationship education is appropriately delivered, and levels of teenage pregnancies are lower in the looked after group than amongst their peers in Redbridge. Those children placed outside of Redbridge have their health assessments and plans specifically undertaken and overseen by the designated nurse.

40. Services to ensure looked after children stay safe are adequate. All children are allocated to qualified social workers, but some do not have up to date care plans. Some records do not show that all are being seen regularly or alone, although children report that they are seen regularly. Although high numbers of children are reported as participating in their review meetings, the link between their contributions and the impact on their care plans are not always clear. Rates of short and long term stability in placement are improving and are now similar to national and statistical neighbour rates. The quality of care plans seen was variable with regard to being outcome focused. Foster carers report that they are well supported to recognise and work with children presenting a risk to themselves or others. They value the safeguarding training offered and there is a high level of take-up. In surveys, looked after children and care leavers indicate that they feel safe within their home settings. Concerns that they feel vulnerable away from home, particularly on public transport, have been recognised. An example of a positive response to their concerns is the provision by the Connexions service of personal alarms for all those who wanted them.

41. Outcomes for enjoying and achieving are broadly in line with similar areas and are adequate. Steps to promote higher achievement are in place but are not yet showing through in improved results in the number of young people achieving higher examination results at the end of year 11. The numbers entered for GCSE and achieving at least one GCSE graded A*-G, are better than in similar areas. However, numbers achieving five GCSEs at higher grades are low and do not show consistent improvement. A range of additional support activities such as the Stepladder programme, a leadership programme for 14 to 16 year old Black and Asian students, has been in place to help raise achievement. As a result, some of these young people achieved GCSE grades higher than those predicted. Children's achievements are not yet fully recorded on social care files. Attendance remains below the national figure, but steps taken to improve this are beginning to have an impact. Exclusions are low. Since September 2009, Personal Education Plans are being completed more regularly and thoroughly with consideration being given to ways in which the Personal Education Allowance can be used creatively to enhance and enrich learning. Multi-agency support services to sustain children in mainstream education are good. Those foster carers seen by inspectors value support from specialist teachers and show commitment to raising the aspirations of children in their care. Looked after children are encouraged to participate in a range of activities. Celebration events for children in care take place periodically during each year with, for example, formal annual awards and achievement ceremonies. Children and young people receive good advice and guidance from staff in the Children Looked After Support Service.

42. Looked after children and care leavers report they have opportunities to develop secure and positive relationships with adults. There is a wide range of opportunities for them to meet together, have fun and learn new skills. The recently established Children in Care Council has the potential to become a purposeful link with the corporate parents. Care leavers have successfully been involved in contributing to the organisation of social events for younger children and are actively encouraged to help one another. Young people and carers report that there is good access to independent advocacy services. All children and young people who met with inspectors were clear on how to access their social worker and were confident that they could do so if needed. Effective multi-agency working has contributed to a decrease in the rate of first time offending for looked after children.

43. Outcomes for achieving economic well-being are adequate and in line with similar areas across London, although not in line with national levels. The proportion of young people continuing into education, employment or training has increased in recent years but this is yet to show a strongly improving trend. However, unvalidated figures for 2009 provided by the council indicate significant improvement. Young people speak of ambitions for themselves and most feel well supported to achieve their goals. A year on year increase is evident in those being supported to attend further and higher education. All but one care leaver currently at university had earlier been Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children indicating that the distribution of achievement is not spread

across the full range of looked after children. Care leavers are not systematically prioritised for work placements or apprenticeships within the Trust. This is a missed opportunity for the local authority in its role as a corporate parent to boost employment opportunities for these young people. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities who are also looked after have effective links to appropriate adult services. Housing for care leavers was identified as an area for improvement in previous inspections and the number in suitable accommodation has now improved, although further development is needed to sustain the improvements achieved. Very small numbers of care leavers are known to be in unsuitable accommodation, albeit temporarily.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

44. Services to children on the edge of care are targeted effectively. Key partner providers are clear about their responsibilities to support the local authority in the discharge of its duties towards looked after children. Primary and secondary health care services, particularly children and young people's mental and sexual health services, provide targeted services in a timely way. Learning and achievement provision is delivered appropriately with children and young people expressing positive regard for the support they receive. The Children's Rights and Advocacy arrangements provide an effective service to children and young people who raise concerns about their care, supporting them where necessary to make a formal complaint. As a result of young people's views, service changes have been made to meet their needs more closely. An example of effective engagement has been where providers were required to present proposed projects to a panel of looked after children. Their views then made a direct impact in the redesign of some projects. Young people report that they know how to access this service, also describing that they have adults around them offering support when needed.

45. The quality of assessment and direct work with children who are looked after and care leavers is inconsistent. While timely decisions are made in relation to the needs of some looked after children, not all files have evidence that care planning has been timely or that management oversight has been sufficiently robust to ensure care plans are well focused. Serious drift in pursuing plans for some children was evident. This is acknowledged by staff and managers as an area for development. Children and young people report positively on the relationships they have, particularly with reference to their teachers and Connexions workers. However, some observe that they have limited opportunity to spend time with their social workers and establish a trusting relationship with them. Examples were seen where up to six social workers had been involved in a space of three years with children. Safeguarding needs and risks in relation to looked after children are assessed and addressed effectively within the service and provider settings.

46. Most looked after children and care leavers have up to date plans which are reviewed in line with statutory guidance. However, minutes of statutory reviews are not always completed in a timely way and record keeping is too

often incomplete and of inconsistent quality. The Casework Panel provides a forum, independent of line management, where professionals examine practice issues around individual children. While showing the potential to improve professional practice, its impact is inconsistent. Sustaining the momentum of care planning for some children is recognised as a continuing challenge for the Trust. There is some evidence of improvement following recent work to strengthen the care planning and review arrangements. There is a recent rise in the number of children and young people with an up to date care plan as well as those with permanency plans by the time they have been looked after for over four months. However, this level and trend in performance are not well established and too many children and young people do not benefit from robust inter-agency care planning. The Fostering and Adoption panel is working effectively to ensure that where children cannot return to their family alternative plans are considered.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

47. Senior managers and politicians exhibit a common determination to ensure improvements are made to the service. A thorough analysis of current and future service challenges has been undertaken with plans being implemented to target added capacity to the front line social work teams, to improve rates of remuneration for foster carers and to enhance the quality assurance function. Team structures are set to be reconfigured with a focus on those newly looked after. The strategy is informed by an understanding of good practice in child-centred planning as well as value for money. However, these measures are a recent response to a situation which has been problematic for some time. While no services are deteriorating, the current strategy has yet to show impact in terms of improving overall outcomes for looked after children and young people and care leavers. The well established Children's Trust underpins solid partnership working. Joint commissioning of services is effective with multi-agency strategies in place to support raising aspiration and achievement. The Headteacher of the Virtual School provides effective support to schools, enabling group and individual opportunities to enrich learning. Young people seen by inspectors value these. While the lead member advocates appropriately for looked after children, a wider understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities is not fully in place with few other members currently involved with the Corporate Parenting Group.

48. The Trust provides leadership for looked after children and care leavers services with positive impact in some areas of operation and effective lines of accountability. However, the development of an ongoing and systematic analysis of the changing nature of the looked after population is yet to be undertaken. Performance targets, mostly met, are in line with similar areas and national figures. While social work management oversight of cases is insufficiently consistent, education and health outcomes are monitored more closely. Training and staff development arrangements are in place and appropriate. The take-up of training is good and staff reported during the inspection and in the survey that they valued the training programme.

49. Collective views of looked after children and care leavers have had a positive influence on outcomes; the recent Children and Young People's Advisory Panel survey identified priorities for those living away from home. Children are recorded as participating well in statutory reviews of their care plans. However, the impact of their views is not consistently evident in records of discussion and decisions made. There is variable evidence that children are seen regularly and known well by their social workers. Their contribution to Personal Education Plans has been inconsistent, although recently this has improved. Children and young people report feeling safe in their placements and enjoy good relationships with the adults who care for and work with them. The Children in Care council, having recently been re-vitalised, offers promise but it is too early to judge the impact it may have.

50. Children's needs arising from race, religion, language and culture are appropriately identified in care plans. Examples of sensitive and effective action taken in response to these needs were noted by inspectors. The profile of children and young people and their parents and carers is well understood and is used both to inform commissioning arrangements and service delivery. The multi-agency strategy for commissioning services is monitored to ensure quality standards. Community support services assist children identified as being vulnerable to being accommodated by the local authority through projects such as Respect, offering flexible support to 'hard to reach' young people in ways acceptable to them.

51. Managers have conducted an analysis of current challenges to the service, characterised by an almost 30% rise in the number of looked after children over a brief period. While remaining below their statistical neighbours, it is evident from the changing demographic profile and in the establishing of appropriate thresholds that current capacity is not sufficient. Additional resources have been secured to improve rates of remuneration for foster carers with the aim of increasing local provision, thereby reducing the comparatively high proportion of children and young people (60%) who are in high cost external placements. A commissioning panel established to review the care plans of looked after children is yet to have its first meeting, although this was imminent at the time of the inspection. However, these measures are recent and limited to tackling the current requirements. Future assessed demands are yet to be fully investigated.

Record of main findings: London Borough of Redbridge

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Adequate
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Adequate
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Adequate
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Adequate
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Adequate

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Adequate
Staying safe	Adequate
Enjoying and achieving	Adequate
Making a positive contribution	Adequate
Economic well-being	Adequate
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Adequate
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Adequate
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Adequate