

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

London Borough of Hillingdon

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Reporting inspector Brendan Parkinson

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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), an Ofsted additional inspector and two inspectors from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.

2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- discussions with 85 children and young people receiving services, 32 parents and carers, 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.
- a review of 46 case files for children and young people with a range of needs. 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, assessment and referral centres 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

Service information

4. Hillingdon has 65,156 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing nearly 26% of the total population of the borough. In January 2009, 48.8% of the school population was classified as belonging to a black or minority ethnic group compared to 21.3% in England overall. A third of pupils speak English as an additional language. Punjabi, Somali and Urdu are the most commonly spoken community languages in the borough. Of the 6.4% of pupils of Black African background, over half are Somali. Hillingdon has 92 schools comprising 65 primary schools, 18 secondary schools (including two Academies), six special schools, one nursery school and two pupil referral units.

5. The Hillingdon Children and Families Trust was established in April 2008. The Trust includes representatives of the Hillingdon Primary Care Trust (PCT), Metropolitan Police, The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust and the Local Authority - including education, children's social care, youth and Connexions services. Other representatives include Hillingdon's voluntary and community organisations, local schools, the Learning and Skills Council, and the further education sector. The Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board became independently chaired in September 2009 and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in Hillingdon that deliver safeguarding services. It has joint arrangements to provide a Child Death Overview Panel with its neighbouring area, Ealing, and plans are at an advanced stage to have a similar arrangement for the independent chairing of respective serious case review panels with another neighbour, Hounslow.

6. Social care services for children have 68 foster carers and four children's homes, including two for respite care. Community-based services are provided by one central referral and assessment team, one assessment team, one private fostering team, two looked after children teams, four asylum-related teams and one 16 plus team. Other family support services are delivered by 12 children's centres.

7. At the time of the inspection there were 438 looked after children. They comprise 48 children under five years of age, 292 children of school age (5–16), and 96 post-16. A total of 712 young people and adults currently have care leaver status. Recent years have seen the emergence, internationally, of children seeking safe haven from their homelands in areas of conflict. Another development has been in the trafficking of children and adults for economic or other purposes. The outcomes are similar with the arrival at ports of entry of children often needing safeguarding and accommodation. Ports of entry (by sea and air) are primary locations where those assessed as children are safeguarded in the first instance. Heathrow airport is located entirely within Hillingdon and, therefore, this local authority must assume responsibility for these children in the same way as any other child within the area. As an indication of the significant impact of Heathrow airport as a port of entry for the UK, 179 of the total number of looked after children are over 16 years, higher

than the total of those 12 years or younger. Of the young people and adults with care leaver status, over half are from Asian or African ethnic backgrounds. Hillingdon uses a Virtual School approach in its support of looked after children to emphasise the individual achievements of children, celebrate their successes, highlight gifted and talented children and support care leavers into further and higher education provision.

8. Commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care is carried out by Hillingdon PCT. Acute hospital services are provided by The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust. Adult and child mental health services are provided by the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust. Hillingdon Community Health (the provider arm of NHS Hillingdon) provides community care services.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

9. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in the area is good. The Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board actively promotes awareness of safeguarding in the area, providing positive and effective leadership on all safeguarding matters. Recent change in the Board's chairing arrangements has been made, and a suitably experienced and independent chairperson has taken up appointment. The Board itself has an extensive membership and is well supported through a wide and relevant range of sub-groups. The attendance of representatives from the UK Border Agency and Adult Social Care add to its reach. Joint policies and procedures for the protection of children are comprehensive and up to date. The Board's Partnership Improvement Plan addresses all relevant aspects of safeguarding and child protection well, is suitably resourced and is a particular strength. Targets are appropriate with assured performance management arrangements firmly in place. Access to, and the take up of positively regarded inter-agency training for all staff and agencies, including the third sector, are good. Links between the Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Families Trust Board are effective and strengthening. The impact of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is good and improving. A range of service improvements is in place, supported and driven by the Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board and delivered effectively with a clear focus on the efficient use of resources.

10. The safeguarding and child protection needs of individual children are addressed in a timely and effective way. Quality assurance and performance management systems are in place but require further development to become

more firmly established within the operational arrangements for children's social care. Some improvement in the quality and content of case recording is recognised as needing to reflect accurately the work undertaken, for example in reporting children's views, chronologies and family structures. Good support, guidance and direction for staff are evident across children's social care. Strategic and operational managers have worked hard and achieved some success in tackling a range of workforce issues using a robust development plan which addresses key issues such as recruitment, retention and staff development. Partnership working between the agencies is characterised by co-operative and collaborative relationships and is good or better in most respects. However, further planning and operational improvements are needed between some agencies, for example between children's social care and the adult mental health services, to improve practice co-ordination and consistency of approach. Partnerships with those with responsibility for the commissioning and delivery of local housing services are improving in aligning activities towards achieving better outcomes for children. Practice guidance in the area of child trafficking is focused on protective responsibilities but requires improvements to reflect more accurately the duties, responsibilities and powers available to all relevant agencies. Communication between professionals and teams is good and all child protection cases are suitably allocated and reviewed. The area of overnight detention of children in police custody is an area needing further work to meet their needs. Initial assessments of immediate child protection needs of children generally show good analysis but core assessments need improvement in this area. Plans too often are insufficiently specific about the desired outcomes.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (good)

11. Safeguarding arrangements in Hillingdon have a good capacity for improvement. There is a range of mature, stable and confident relationships across the managerial and political landscape of the area. These demonstrate ambition and a drive for improvement in all aspects of safeguarding. The track record for improvement in safeguarding has been consistently good with solid improvements in key safeguarding performance indicators over recent years. There is a passionate and shared determination across the partnership to continue in this vein. The workforce is sufficiently qualified, experienced and stable overall, displaying a strong commitment to safeguarding in the work undertaken. A notable example of this is the service for children seeking asylum who form a significant proportion of all children with safeguarding and accommodation needs in Hillingdon. Political and senior management leadership has ensured consistent responsiveness to need, with sufficient resources allocated to services. Good progress is also being made in the development of prevention and early intervention services to support vulnerable children, including those recently ceasing to be subject to a child protection plan.

12. Good efforts are made to gain the views of service users but more could be done to make use of this in the evaluation and development of services. The

creation of young people's participation scheme in child protection is an excellent example of this commitment being realised imaginatively. Performance targets could be stretched even further with a greater use of qualitative and impact information. The implementation of agreed thresholds, referral and assessment processes is generally understood and effectively used. However, more explicit information about the agreed thresholds between social care and referring agencies could ensure this is more firmly established. The universal requirement for the provision of the CAF is routinely used as a referral mechanism but is not always appropriate to all circumstances; for example for busy staff within the accident and emergency section of The Hillingdon Hospital and referrals to the social care out of hours service.

Areas for improvement

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

Within three months:

- Improve the practice guidance as it relates to meeting the safeguarding needs of suspected trafficked children to ensure alignment with the duties, responsibilities and powers available to all relevant agencies.
- Ensure that police and social care practice reflects a proper balance of needs and risks to children in relation to requirements to transfer children to social care accommodation where overnight detention in police custody would otherwise be used.
- Ensure that social care assessments of children in need consistently contain a clear analysis of need with specific and measurable objectives.

Within six months:

- Further develop inter-agency understanding and alignment of thresholds to the single point of referral for children in need.
- Develop further and fully establish the quality audit programme within social care services ensuring independent evaluation of assessment, planning and recording of interventions with children and their families.
- Achieve improvements in the quality and timeliness of case file recording, including direct input to the computer systems and in particular consistent maintenance of chronologies and genograms.

- Ensure that all workers undertake and consistently record contact with children when seen alone to gain their views, wishes and feelings.
- Improve inter-agency working in circumstances where parents or carers have mental health difficulties that are likely to impact upon the safeguarding or protection needs of a child in those families.

Outcomes for children and young people

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 2 (good)

14. The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe is good. Children in need of protection and safeguarding are identified well and the awareness of safeguarding issues is good or better in almost all settings. There is effective co-operation between agencies in assessing the needs of, and risks to, children, leading to plans which ensure that children are suitably protected. The single referral point is efficient, although a close alignment of thresholds and expectations between the range of referring professionals and this contact point has not yet been achieved. Safeguarding in institutional settings including fostering, residential care and children's centres is given a high priority and has been judged to be 'good' in most recent inspections. The work of the parenting partnership in supporting the safe care of children is highly effective and highly valued by users. A good user engagement strategy is being implemented to extend user engagement and learning from that experience through an agreed approach across agencies, although the links between the views sought, the aggregated learning from individual cases, and the resultant improvements in safeguarding services are not yet fully in place.

15. Staff recruitment and vetting processes across partner agencies accord with current guidance and regulations and are appropriately implemented. Well focused attention is given, through the child death overview arrangements, to circumstances where specific safeguarding needs are identified following accidents or peri-natal deaths. The range of specialist teams within the Metropolitan Police service is both actively and proactively engaged with their child protection and safeguarding responsibilities. They display a considerable commitment to these responsibilities.

16. With regard to children arrested under criminal justice provision, it is acknowledged that few, if any, are subsequently transferred to local authority accommodation following a police decision not to bail them back to the community. These children are almost always then subject to overnight

detention in custody which, in all but the exceptionally few cases, is not appropriate in relation to addressing their welfare needs.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 2 (good)

17. The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe is good. A number of initiatives take place in both the universal and targeted services to consult children and young people, including how safe they feel in a range of settings. Of particular note are the specific services designed to safeguard children seeking asylum from the risk of trafficking and exploitation. Extensive partnership arrangements are designed to maximise protection by restricting potential contact between the child and the trafficker. The procedures for staff in these situations are robust and targeted on safeguarding children from suspected trafficking and exploitation but are not fully accurate when specifying that actions required are fully within the roles, responsibilities and duties of social care settings. More work is needed to ensure that the powers of the local authority to control access to, and movement of, these children is clearly articulated in guidance and procedures applied once children move beyond the authority of the UK Border Agency.

18. The local authority makes extensive and effective proactive efforts to reduce the likelihood of ethnic and cultural intolerance as well as illegal practices, for example combating forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Youth crime and anti-social behaviour areas are also being effectively tackled with a focus on ensuring the necessary safeguarding and protective links are in place. Considerable efforts are made in identifying and addressing the safeguarding needs of children suffering the effects of domestic abuse and are developing in relation to harm consequent to the misuse of drugs. Anti-bullying and e-safety are currently prioritised by Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board partner agencies. When surveyed, fewer Hillingdon children said they experience bullying than the national average. Hospital admissions due to deliberate or unintentional injury have also been reducing in recent years to below the national average.

The quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

19. The quality of provision is good. Referrals to the Assessment team are responded to in a timely manner, with cases allocated promptly and staff working with manageable numbers of children's cases. Managerial oversight is evident and proportionate to the risks involved although the focus on impact and outcomes for the children concerned is not always clear. Partnership working to safeguard children is good. Escalation arrangements to resolve any operational difficulties are in place and lead to prompt resolution. The current

arrangements for addressing the safeguarding needs of children with disabilities are effective. However, it is acknowledged that more remains to be done to sustain and develop further the necessary knowledge, skills and links with the safeguarding teams.

20. Prompt action taken to support safeguarding across all statutory agencies that have significant child protection responsibilities is demonstrated by timely management actions such as temporary and permanent additions to staffing resources in response to increased service demands. Prioritisation of work is good with robust, well managed transfer arrangements that ensure services can respond to agreed priorities. Assessments are mostly completed in a timely way and the local authority's performance is in line with comparable areas. Staff report positively on the levels of management support, supervision and the quality of training available. In some cases assessments of children in need are not always sufficiently analytical and evidence that the child has been seen is not always recorded. Similarly, some of the plans in these cases do not contain clear or measurable objectives.

21. The recently commissioned computer-based integrated children's data system has been helpful but full implementation has yet to take place across all relevant services. The council recognises that further development is needed to ensure that both read and write facilities are fully available within all relevant teams and locations. Much of this is planned to take place as part of the project planning for the continuing roll out and development of the system. Similarly, there are several systems within the health community that do not, as yet, interface with each other.

22. The quality and timeliness of initial assessments and activity to protect children are good once thresholds have been established. Strategy meetings are equally timely, focused and clearly recorded, although not always within the main case record. The proportions of initial and core assessments completed in a timely way are above the national average, having improved over recent years, although there has been a minor reduction in the current year. Some core assessments do not contain the depth of analysis necessary and many do not contain a chronology of significant events in the child's life. Whilst genograms are evident, the significance of absent parents or key extended family is sometimes not recognised, although in most others there is a good recognition of the role of non-resident family members.

23. Children with a protection plan are seen regularly and there is good description of their appearance and demeanour. Those over the age of 12 years are encouraged to participate in formal meetings, such as conferences and reviews, although the numbers who do so are small. This has been recognised and an excellent strategy of employing a participation worker has been established. This is a recent appointment and outcomes are yet to be realised but this is a most promising approach in terms of advocacy and user engagement. Reviews are always within timescales, although some would

benefit from earlier timetabling commensurate with the nature and seriousness of concerns.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (good)

24. The council and broader partnerships provide visible leadership in safeguarding children. Senior officers ensure staff across the council and its partners contribute to the planning and delivery of key priorities and to the achievement of sustainable positive outcomes for children and young people. Commissioning arrangements are good and set to improve further following work undertaken by the Children and Families Trust. Specialist assessments are often commissioned appropriately and delivered within appropriate timescales. The Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board provides robust co-ordination of service planning and development, within which partner agencies are held to account. The Partnership Improvement Plan, which is at the centre of this, is an outstanding feature of Hillingdon services. There are clear responsibilities identified in the relationship between the Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust, supported by clear protocols. Respective commissioning and performance responsibilities are well identified and alignment of work programmes is underway to reflect this. Information sharing arrangements are well developed across the partner agencies. Statutory requirements are followed appropriately and lines of accountability are clear.

25. Good general quality assurance mechanisms are in place, using formal supervision, accessible consultation and robust transfer arrangements. The recording of these, however, mostly tends towards the descriptive rather than the evaluative, and many do not show how the improvement work is being managerially focused or driven. Transfer arrangements for cases are good, with all the necessary actions and arrangements for effective transfers of children's plans and cases in place. Active file reading, undertaken by the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services, reflects the ownership and recognition of the importance of this work within the local authority. They review a sample of cases each month in order to keep in touch with practice developments in children's social care. However, regular and independent auditing of performance is yet to be systematically integrated within this area of work. The CAF is used extensively by many partner agencies, particularly within schools and the health communities, although consistency in the quality of assessments is recognised as needing improvement. The work of children's centres and extended school activity is generally good or very good in the focus given to safeguarding.

26. While user involvement is developing positively, systematic engagement of children and young people in contributing to service development is insufficiently developed. A robust approach to ensuring that proposed development of participation over the next two years is not yet in place. However, some examples of good engagement with parents, carers and children are evident in evaluating the early intervention and preventative

services. The impact of leadership and management on equality and diversity for safeguarding is good. Management information is used effectively to deliver some improvements and to sustain safeguarding and child protection services that are sensitive to the diverse needs of local communities. An example is the delivery of culturally sensitive support to families of specific communities that experience domestic violence. Children and young people more broadly, and their parents and carers, report that their needs are understood in the context of their culture, language, religion and identity. Good consideration is given to the changing profile of the most commonly used community languages in the translation of written materials. Interpreting services are provided whenever necessary.

27. Access to services meeting the needs of disabled children is valued by parents and carers who feel that services have improved over time, although some express uncertainty over the extent of their knowledge of the full range of potential services available. The support provided by Parenting Partnership services is a highly valued provision for these families.

28. Value for money in respect of safeguarding provision is good. Expenditure is proportionate to identified need. Funding is provided in a timely and targeted way, and is responsive to demand pressures and developing needs as they change over time.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

29. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and care leavers is good. Leadership across the partnership has resulted in a shared vision for all professionals working with looked after children. Significant progress has been made in relation to ensuring good health and educational outcomes for most looked after children. Statutory requirements are met well and there is a good track record of improvement in service quality, for example, low rates of looked after children involved in criminal activity and effective early intervention to prevent children becoming looked after. Robust joint working at a strategic and operational level has resulted in good, sustained improvements in outcomes for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This group of children provides the largest group provided with accommodation in Hillingdon. National targets for improving services are clear and are being consistently met. All initiatives are kept under close scrutiny, through established performance management and quality assurance arrangements. These are overseen by an effective Corporate Parenting Board, as well as through well-focused operational sub-groups. At practice level, plans for looked after children and their impact on outcomes are scrutinised systematically within a well managed process of statutory reviews and in regular case supervision. Improvements are necessary in the timeliness of recording generally and, more specifically, in ensuring the currency of care plans remains.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (good)

30. The partnership has good capacity for improvement. Acceptance and promotion of corporate responsibility for looked after children are evident across the partnership. The Children's Trust and the Corporate Parenting Board provide effective oversight to monitor performance and to identify gaps in services to secure improvements. The exemplary development of services for asylum seeking children and partnership work for this vulnerable group in Hillingdon are of particular note.

31. Good progress has been made to ensure continuous improvement in looked after services for young people. Effective work is provided by the Looked After Children's Service, Placement Services and the Looked After Children Education Service – now the Virtual School for looked after children - which work closely together and with other partner agencies. A wide range of good quality, commissioned providers makes a consistently good contribution to the overall quality of support and outcomes for looked after children. Where new services are required, there is good evidence of the partnership being prepared

to re-commission or to change priorities. An example of this is the Social Work Practice pilot initiative of which Hillingdon is one of the participating authorities nationally. This pilot has been systematically planned, developed and managed with good engagement of staff and service users. The numbers of children subject to proceedings through the Public Law Outline has increased substantially recently, with limited numbers of initial case plans (requiring a threshold to be met for a care or supervision order) being sustained through to the outcome of proceedings. Further work to understand and to achieve a shared understanding of thresholds and the needs of children is required in this aspect of work.

Areas for improvement

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

Within three months:

- Ensure that case recording is consistently up to date, and subsequently maintained in a timely way.

Within six months:

- Achieve improved case planning under the Public Law Outline, through a shared understanding of key issues within family court liaison arrangements.
- Ensure that care plans are updated promptly following statutory reviews and are recorded in a way that children and young people can understand and engage with.

Outcomes for children and young people

33. Services to promote good health outcomes among looked after children are good. Health assessments are completed on time, both for young people placed locally and those placed out of area. Most looked after children have up to date dental checks and immunisations, and are registered with local general practitioners. The work of the innovative immunisation task force for looked after children enables young people to catch up with missed immunisations. The designated nurse and doctor for children and young people in care are actively involved in providing advice and support for both health and social care staff. The designated doctor reviews all health assessments and is linked with the adoption and fostering panel. Foster carers are provided with advice and training about health needs of looked after children. The health needs of asylum-seeking looked after children are particularly well recognised and met. The emotional health of asylum-seeking looked after children is well supported,

for example the Wellbeing project provides specialist mental health assessment, treatment and support as well as training and support for staff and carers. Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for all looked after children is timely. Sexual health needs are met well with prompt access to sexual health advice during health assessments and in settings preferred by young people. Partnership working is good with clear information sharing in a timely manner. Health provision for looked after children with disabilities is of a high quality with some outstanding respite care provision.

34. Good quality safeguarding arrangements are in place for looked after children. Commissioning and procurement processes ensure good quality provision with continuous monitoring arrangements and effective reviewing of any safeguarding issues. Social workers robustly carry out timely statutory visits to ensure looked after children are safeguarded, that children are seen alone, and their safeguarding needs are met. However, the turnover of social workers diminishes the quality of relationships for some children. There are specific and effective arrangements to address the safeguarding needs of those children who go missing from care, and arrangements are particularly robust in relation to children whom it is thought may be subject to child trafficking and exploitation.

35. Good education support is in place for looked after children, including those placed out of area. Provision is well targeted, enabling children and young people to enjoy and achieve. Virtual School arrangements are being implemented on time and are on track to meet targets in local plans. Most looked after children and care leavers make good educational progress in relation to their starting points in most subjects and key stages. The attainment of looked after children at Key Stage 2 is not as strong as that of their peers who are within the national average range, and targeted action is being taken to reduce the gap. Initiatives such as the Letterbox Club, providing books, mathematics activities and educational materials every month for six months for Key Stage 2 looked after children educated in and outside of the area, have had good impact on improving attainment in the key areas of literacy and numeracy. Personal educational allowances are used flexibly to meet the needs of older looked after children and mentoring is in place for all in Year 10. Looked after children are given appropriate priority for school places in Hillingdon and the monitoring of schools receiving Hillingdon pupils outside the area is given high priority to ensure those pupils, many of whom who have special educational needs or are children seeking asylum, are well supported. Active intervention is provided when looked after children do not attend their school placements, resulting in absence levels well below the average for looked after children nationally. Fixed-term and permanent exclusion rates are very low compared to those for other children in the area. Good support is provided to assist asylum seeking young people with their core educational needs. Looked after children are well supported to take up the range of outdoor and extra-curricular activities, tailored closely to their needs and where they live. Hobbies and activities are appropriately considered in care reviews although achievements are not yet recorded fully on social care files. Looked

after children are encouraged and enabled to celebrate success, for example in organising and running the annual Kids in Care awards.

36. Opportunities for looked after children to make a positive contribution are good. Consultation with looked after children and care leavers is formalised at a strategic level. Representative groups for looked after children are an integral part of wider participation and consultation in the area. The views of looked after children have influenced some changes in services that affect them such as the Social Work Practice pilot and development of the asylum service. Some looked after children contribute to the selection of staff. High proportions of looked after children take part in reviews of their care plans and are enabled to be involved in making decisions about their lives, including chairing their own care reviews. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are appropriately given the support they need to contribute to their reviews. Looked after children have good access to a proactive advocacy service. Increasingly, reviews of educational and care plans for those children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are held at the same time with good impact on their engagement. Many looked after children and care leavers report that their needs are met well and that the support they receive improves their social and emotional well-being, including at key transition points.

37. The incidence of offending or anti-social behaviour by looked after children is within the national average and reducing further, although the overall rate remains stable, slightly below the national average. Whilst the use of custody as a sentence has reduced substantially over the previous year, this is now just in line with statistical neighbours although still higher than the national average.

38. The impact of services in enabling children and young people in care and care leavers to achieve economic well-being is good. Outcomes for economic well-being post-16 are good overall. Care leavers have high aspirations and high numbers are achieving well in further and higher education, with more than 100 undertaking university training during 2009. Most care leavers are positive about the plans in place to support their transition to adulthood. Those who are post-16 in care and educated in Hillingdon benefit from a broad range of routes to qualification. The 14–19 curriculum is relevant for care leavers and includes a sufficient range of vocational options. The Virtual School and Connexions personal advisors provide good, targeted support. However, the proportion of all care leavers who are in education, employment or training is in line with the national average and not closing on similar areas. The pathway plans for most young people seeking asylum who are leaving care document their learning needs well. Transition plans for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are cared for are thorough, timely and regularly updated. Most care leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents/carers know what support is available for them and provision is tailored well to need. The proportion of care leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in education, employment or training is low. A high

proportion stay on in education, however many of the courses and options do not lead to employment in the long term.

39. The council provides well matched apprenticeships, work placements and extended work experience to increasing numbers of looked after children and care leavers, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which are valued by the participants. Until recently fewer Hillingdon care leavers had suitable accommodation than the national average. Improvements recently made ensure that most care leavers now have good access to safe, affordable and permanent accommodation which meets many of their needs. Recent data indicate that the proportions are now in line with statistical neighbours. There is no use of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast. This is a most positive aspect of practice. Care leavers receive good advice to manage their finances.

The quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

40. The quality of provision is good overall. Improved resources for services to children on the edge of care are being effectively used to target those children through, for example, the recently implemented Intensive Family Support Service, supporting safe and effective parenting for families with children vulnerable to entering care or having recently ceased being subject to a child protection plan. Likewise, the provision for asylum seeking children has recently been reorganised enabling further improvements to be achieved in allocation to a lead professional and a knowledgeable response from the point of entry to care. A wide range of placement providers are commissioned (66 at the time of inspection) with the specific aim of attempting to provide a close match to the individual needs of the child. 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's mental and sexual health services, provide specific targeted services. Learning and achievement provision is also delivered within clear corporate responsibilities, providing good additional support to children, enabling them to catch up with their peers or excel in specific areas of achievement. Most children are aware they can complain, and some have done so, but others are less clear how they would go about this.

41. Assessments and direct work with children are adequate, being mostly thorough, reflecting the wishes and feelings of the child in care, and identifying needs with evidence of direct work with them in the areas identified. In some cases there is significant delay in case recording being completed and not all assessments are sufficiently analytical. This has also been identified in a recent case audit and steps are being taken to improve practice. The asylum service has developed good specialist assessment skills and works effectively with the fostering service to make and support appropriate placements for asylum seeking children. The local authority commissions parenting and other specialist

assessments externally, providing added value. There is evidence of appropriate management oversight of the work in all cases seen.

42. Arrangements for planning, reviews and recording of statutory reviews for looked after children are well managed and informed by all relevant partner agencies. Young people and their carers are appropriately enabled to participate in reviews. Increasingly, and whenever possible, care reviews are being held at the same time and location as special educational needs reviews to increase the participation of looked after children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good planning and reviews are also well established for asylum seeking children, including the consideration of permanency planning. Positive links are in place with voluntary agencies such as the Asphaleia outreach team and the Befriending Hillingdon Unaccompanied Minors Project, providing enhanced packages of support facilitating these children to adapt and integrate. Independent reviewing officers rigorously monitor care plans and identify performance issues within and across cases. An example is the recognition that looked after children have not been reading their care plans as they are not user-friendly, leading to the format being under review. Some care plans are also not promptly updated by social workers following reviews. Files, reviews and pathway plans show that there is regular and systematic participation for most looked after children and care leavers in their care planning processes and pathway plans, leading to improved outcomes.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (good)

43. There is good leadership and management of the services for looked after children. Political and managerial leadership across the partnership is sustained, with clear ambition and prioritisation providing for improving outcomes for looked after children. Corporate parenting is good overall with a clear commitment to safeguarding looked after children and care leavers. Performance in almost all key indicators is as good as or better than both the national average and neighbouring areas. Operational management provides local quality assurance and a focus on performance management with support, guidance and direction evident. Workforce planning has contributed to all looked after children being appropriately allocated to qualified social workers. It is acknowledged by the council, however, that social work staff turnover has impacted adversely in some cases on the continuity of support and the quality of relationships with looked after children and their carers.

44. Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to contribute to individual care planning and reviews and a high proportion do so. Most children and young people interviewed and surveyed during this inspection were positive about the services they receive. Some young people are enabled to contribute to planning and evaluation of broader services. A number have been enabled to manage their care plan reviews. They describe feeling empowered by this. Looked after children have ready access to committed council members, who

engage with young people and hear their views in a variety of formal and informal events. They also have access to a range of support to enable them to prepare for key decisions in their lives and to participate in consultations about services.

45. Good partnerships across all agencies result in prompt communication and liaison at an individual operational level as well as at the strategic level. The needs of looked after children are actively identified, promoted and met through collaborative joint working, supported by good access to specialist and commissioned services. The child trafficking sub-group has effective strategies to disrupt trafficking and discourage young people from leaving care. Close collaboration, good information sharing and some innovative work with vulnerable children contribute to a continuing reduction of those who go missing.

46. There is a strong ownership and understanding of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural needs of looked after children within the area. Substantial efforts have been made by partner agencies in understanding and responding to individual need, with examples of good practice seen in most cases. A good use is noted of demographic data in planning services with an active strategic focus on the needs of those children from minority backgrounds and cultures who arrive in the area. One local children's centre visited displayed an outstanding approach to inclusion and was striving to continually improve its responsiveness to need. The challenges brought about through the arrival of lone children from around the world have been positively embraced by partner agencies, notably for children on the edge of care. Youth and Connexions services positive activities display an outstanding approach to inclusion with good impact for young people in care with a diverse range of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Emerging community languages are continuously monitored to ensure that leaflets and other materials are available in the most common languages, contributing to the support of those children on the edge of care.

47. Effectiveness and efficiency of services for looked after children are routinely scrutinised to ensure value for money. Commissioned services are regularly monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of children, are of good quality and provide value for money. A Multi Agency Resource Panel is particularly effective in ensuring the commissioning of cost effective provision which meets the needs of looked after children. The Children and Families Trust is at the point of confirming a firm platform for the future joint commissioning of services across a wide spectrum of provision. All key partner agencies, including organisations in the voluntary and community sectors, are committed to this as a way forward.

Record of main findings: Hillingdon

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

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