

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

London Borough of Redbridge

Inspection dates: 8 – 17 October 2012
Lead inspector Ian Young HMI

Age group: All

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Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

2. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Redbridge is judged to be **good**.

Areas for improvement

3. In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Redbridge, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Within three months:

- strengthen existing processes to identify and reduce the number of children, young people, and vulnerable young adults who are also parents, at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking
- ensure that children and young people's ethnic, cultural and religious needs are consistently recorded, to evidence that they are being robustly considered and addressed in assessments and plans
- ensure that the analysis of risk within assessments is of a consistently high quality and is explicitly and comprehensively recorded by social workers
- ensure specific and measurable outcomes are identified for the intensive support team on which to base service developments
- ensure that the planned publicity campaign to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements effectively identifies all eligible children and young people.

Within six months:

- ensure that plans to extend existing advocacy support to children and young people at child protection case conferences are fully implemented and effectively promoted
- strengthen the analysis and evaluation of performance at team and service area levels in a way that engages front line managers and staff.

About this inspection

4. This inspection was unannounced.
5. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. Inspectors have scrutinised case files, observed practice and discussed the help and protection given to these children and young people with social workers, managers and other professionals including members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Wherever possible, they have talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have analysed performance data, reports and management information that the local authority holds to inform its work with children and young people.
6. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.
7. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one seconded inspector.
8. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

9. The London Borough of Redbridge has approximately 74,727 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 27% of the overall population. The 2011 Census showed that Redbridge had a higher proportion of children and young people under the age of 19 years compared to London (24.5%) and nationally (23.9%). The proportion entitled to free school meals is significantly above the national average. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 66.3% of the total population under 19 years. The largest minority ethnic groups are Indian, 17.5%, Pakistani 15.1%, Other Asian 7.9%, Black African 7.9%, and Bangladeshi 5.7%. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is significantly above the national figure.
10. The child protection assessment service (CPAS) receives and responds to all contacts and referrals to children's social care. The service also provides an intensive support team (IST) which works predominantly with children on the edge of care. A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) has been agreed with partner agencies and will become operational in early 2013. An emergency duty service works closely with the CPAS.

11. The CPAS is closely linked to, and co-located with, a number of early intervention teams. Early help for children and families is also provided by a wide range of services including 17 children's centres, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), a children with disabilities service, schools, health services and the dedicated common assessment framework (CAF) team.
12. Community based social work services are provided from two children's resource centres. These services are co-located with health visitors, education welfare officers and educational psychologists with whom they work closely. Both children's resource centres also contain a children's centre which provides a multi-agency focus for work with children and their families. A community-based parenting assessment service works with children and families to evaluate whether children are at risk when remaining within their families.
13. The children with disabilities service provides a range of early help, short breaks and targeted services and has a particular focus on the direct engagement of those who use services in planning and commissioning.

Overall effectiveness

14. The overall effectiveness of arrangements for the protection of Redbridge's children is **good**. The investment by the council of substantial, additional financial resources to front line children's services, and their judicious deployment by senior managers, has resulted in significant, identifiable service improvements. Recent developments to the range and reach of early intervention and preventative services have been designed and delivered well. The introduction by the Children's Trust of a coherent early intervention strategy and the development of accessible preventative services means that families are receiving a useful, practical offer of early help. An identified improvement in both the numbers and quality of assessments completed under the common assessment framework (CAF) has been facilitated by the appointment of seven CAF coordinators, and has resulted in the effective, multi-agency assessment and delivery of the early help that families need.
15. Significant recent improvements to the statutory services that protect children are also in evidence; enhanced by the recruitment of 33 additional social work posts. These appointments, together with the appropriate maintenance of shared and well-understood thresholds for social work intervention, mean that social workers now have manageable workloads of 14 cases on average each, and this means they can undertake direct work with children and young people and get to know them well. All social workers spoken to during the inspection say that they are well supported and trained to protect children. Consideration by inspectors of children's case files demonstrates substantial recent improvements in safe social work practice, for example child protection enquiries are timely and thorough. The highly effective use of the 'strengthening families' model during child protection conferences helps social workers and their partners to establish the degree of risk to the child and to plan accordingly. Where child protection plans are put in place, the use of written agreements with parents is particularly effective in ensuring a partnership approach, although formal advocacy arrangements need to be embedded. However, more could be done to improve the quality of written assessments so that they do justice to social worker's sharp awareness of children and young people's cultural needs, and also to analyse risk and protective factors to a consistently high standard. Although the key recommendations of an earlier Ofsted inspection of private fostering arrangements (PFA), which were judged inadequate, have been met, further development is required to make sure that professionals are aware of the PFA, and ensure that children and young people being parented in this way are safe.
16. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) has championed a robust performance management system within the council, and this can demonstrate the delivery of several significant performance improvements. However, this successful methodology now needs to be

strengthened by the development of a more evaluative approach that can be rolled out to front line managers and staff and allow them to understand how performance has been improved and how they can sustain it. For example this would assist with plans to extend the lessons learned by the intensive support team from a Research in Practice pilot to other teams by providing a greater understanding of what works and what is less effective.

17. Strong partnership working is effectively overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), which also provides a comprehensive multi-agency training programme. Several examples were seen by inspectors of effective arrangements for protecting children through collaborative working. However, although existing arrangements for the identification and tracking of individual young people at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking is effective, a system for identifying children at risk of exploitation by networks is as yet underdeveloped.
18. The council and its partners have fully embraced the recommendations of the Munro review of child protection including the creation of the post of Principal Social Worker, which has added considerable value to the 'learning culture' both within the council and its key partnerships. Highly effective workforce planning has delivered a qualified and competent workforce and is a key strength of the organisation. This means that Redbridge's children and young people are benefiting from a highly motivated workforce that, both individually and collectively, is genuinely child-centred and is constantly looking for ways in which to improve the good quality of the services it provides.

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers

19. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people and their families is **good**. Universal services such as schools, children's centres and health services appropriately identify and assess the need for additional support to a child or family. A range of accessible early intervention services ensure timely, early help by single agencies or multi-agency partnerships. Effective communication, including with the voluntary sector, underpins a collective responsibility for helping families to address concerns about their children.
20. Recent developments in the approach to early help, introduced by the Children's Trust, have formalised previously uncoordinated, localised arrangements. The vision that children should receive early help to prevent the need for statutory intervention is commonly shared across partners. For example, family support workers based in children's centres are identified by schools and parents as providing good support in the home and reducing the need for more specialised, targeted services. Partner agencies report much improved access to helpful advice and

practical support from the CAF co-ordinators and the CAF is now used well across agencies to identify children's needs.

21. The youth service makes an effective contribution to early intervention for young people. A wide range of activities provide good opportunities to engage young people in a positive, age appropriate way; identifying those who may be in need of targeted services and making appropriate referrals to social care where there are significant concerns.
22. Where a range of agencies are working with a child or family as a team around the child (TAC), regular TAC meetings provide good opportunities to share information and identify the key agency to coordinate the support offered. These meetings are well conducted and demonstrate a clear focus on the needs of the child, and result in a practical set of actions, designed to improve outcomes. CAF files reviewed by inspectors confirm that the views of parents are customarily well considered and they inform plans that clearly identify the support to be offered. Written records of parents and young people's views illustrate that they appreciate the help received.
23. Arrangements with schools to monitor, track and locate children missing from education are robust and firmly based on statutory requirements and agreed London protocols. Data is collected, analysed and regularly reported to senior managers to identify trends. There is heavy pressure on school places due to a growing pupil population and this is impacting on the number of children and young people potentially missing education. The local authority has taken significant action in recent years to increase school places to reflect demand.
24. In cases where assessment has identified risk of significant harm to children, a prompt response by children's services and their partners ensures that they are effectively safeguarded. Excellent application of the "strengthening families" approach during child protection conferences establishes very clearly for parents the degree of risk to children and the consequences of non-intervention. The views of parents are carefully explored and difficult issues are sensitively but transparently handled through good preparation prior to meetings and impressive leadership from the chair, which was commented upon positively by all parents and family members spoken to. Written agreements are regularly and effectively employed to convey clear expectations and set out contingency plans to be followed if these are not met. In cases seen by inspectors, when the plan to protect children was jeopardised by the non-engagement of parents, there was appropriate escalation, with social workers seeking management direction and some cases progressing appropriately to a legal planning meeting.
25. Workers spoken to have sharp awareness of the needs of Redbridge's diverse population and the resources they are able to draw upon when developing plans in response to particular needs. Some cases demonstrate

particular insightfulness about cultural heritage, for example access to the Anachal Project, which offers a range of support such as counselling services for woman and children from ethnically diverse groups subjected to domestic violence. The needs of the area's comparatively large Gypsy Roma population are appropriately considered. Access to interpreters is routinely offered to parents and children where necessary, to ensure a clear understanding of the help on offer and the role that children's services and partners can play. However, on case files reviewed by inspectors, sensitive handling by social workers of children and young people's cultural needs is poorly recorded on written assessments and plans.

26. The key recommendations of an Ofsted inspection report which judged private fostering arrangements (PFA) inadequate have been satisfactorily addressed. The council's performance monitoring systems have recognised that there are currently nine arrangements identified and this is fewer than at the last inspection when there were 13. They plan to embark on a publicity campaign to raise public and professional awareness of the PFA.
27. The well managed IST offers well targeted support from qualified social workers who respond quickly and appropriately to family crises. IST social workers hold protected caseloads to facilitate direct work with young people on the edge of care and their families. Good partnership working, including consultation with and access to CAHMS, enables individually tailored programmes of support. Effective monitoring of the suitability of referrals by the team manager and senior practitioner means that there is no waiting list and referrals are quickly allocated to ensure a timely offer of targeted support. The team is supported well by senior managers, with plans in place to develop the service further. Workers have a good understanding of the impact of working with children and young people on the edge of care and can describe the effectiveness of their work.

The quality of practice

28. The quality of practice is **good**. Universal services such as schools, children's centres and youth clubs provide a good range of timely, early help. Review of children's files by inspectors confirms that the common assessment framework (CAF) is being used more consistently than at the time of Ofsted's inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in 2010, resulting in effective multi-agency assessment and direct, practical offers of help. As a result, families' circumstances are improving, and this reduces the need for children and families to receive formal intervention from children's social care. According to the council's own monitoring, the rate of repeat referrals to children's social care is reducing month on month. The quality of almost all CAFs seen is good, with action plans reflecting the views of parents on the range of support that they need to improve their children's lives. Services working with older children such as Connexions or Fusion are skilled at capturing and

recording the views of young people. Where the views of younger children are recorded, they demonstrate the positive impact of the support received.

29. Agencies have a shared and clear understanding of thresholds for referral to children's social care. The screening team offer a consistent, effective and timely consultation service to partner agencies that need advice on whether a case meets the threshold for referral, or requires signposting to another service.
30. Children coming to the attention of children's services out of hours team receive a good service and information is passed to the screening team in a clear and concise manner at the daily handover meetings. The out of hours service is well staffed with experienced social workers. They are able to offer evening or weekend monitoring visits to further ensure the welfare of children and young people.
31. Referrals that meet the threshold for a child protection enquiry are responded to promptly, with robust decision making. Investigations are undertaken once comprehensive information sharing is completed. Section 47 enquiries are always undertaken by qualified social workers with appropriate experience, who are well supported by their managers. These enquiries are timely and thorough and lead to strategy meetings that result in a clearly defined lead agency and designated roles and tasks.
32. The timeliness of initial and core assessments is improving. The Borough's own performance monitoring demonstrates that the timely completion rate of core assessment has increased from 66% in 2010/11 to 73% this year to date. The quality of written assessments is an area for development previously identified by the Borough's quality assurance processes and the action taken has resulted in some improvement, although it remains variable and written recording of the analysis of risk and protective factors within some assessments is still inconsistent. However, when spoken to by inspectors, social workers are able to verbally analyse risks to children and demonstrate that this deficit has not left any child at risk. In cases involving domestic violence, nearly all assessments by social workers demonstrate clear identification of its impact on children, including reference to relevant research.
33. The parenting assessment service provides a comprehensive and high quality range of assessment and support programmes to children and their families. This service has enabled social workers to access detailed, bespoke assessments of parenting skills and capacity in complex cases. Although recently developed, the service provided by this team has led to significant improvements in the parenting afforded to referred children and young people. Parents spoken to were able to cite many areas in which they have now improved their parenting and developed greater insight into the needs of their children. Social workers and case files

reflect significant reductions in risk factors to children following the service's assessments and interventions.

34. Children allocated to a social worker's caseload are seen regularly and seen alone. Their welfare is effectively monitored and social workers know their children well. Social workers actively attempt to engage children and young people and all social workers carry a toolkit that enables direct social work techniques to be used with children in their home. Children and young people spoken to during the inspection feel listened to and their views are well considered and represented within assessments, plans and reviews. The use of advocates for children and young people at child protection conferences is coordinated by the Children's Rights Officer. However, this scheme has been introduced very recently and is not yet fully embedded.
35. Parents spoken to during the inspection report that they felt listened to, helped and supported well and that social workers understand and consider their wishes and feelings. Parents are clear about the processes to protect the welfare of their children and were able to describe to inspectors what they need to change in order to improve outcomes for their children. They are routinely invited to multi-agency meetings, where their views are sensitively and proactively sought.
36. The quality of reports to child protection conferences was identified for improvement by the council's performance monitoring process and is now good. They are comprehensive and detailed and most are shared with parents prior to the conference. The timeliness for initial child protection case conferences was also identified for improvement and nearly all are now held within timescale. The number of children subject to a child protection plan for a second time is reducing and this has been appropriately targeted by the council to ensure that children in need plans are suitably in place as a 'step down' process. The council has, in recent months, also taken appropriate action to ensure children have not been subject to a plan for two years or more, when in April this figure stood at 33%. Decisive action is now being taken in a timely way to determine children's long-term arrangements and avoid drift.
37. Plans for the protection of children and young people are outcome focused, specific and measurable. Robust reviewing arrangements are in place which ensures plans are reviewed regularly and offers of help and protection reflect changing and improving circumstances for children and young people. Plans mostly reflect consideration of contingency arrangements. Written agreements are regularly implemented with parents in appropriate circumstances and their impact on reducing risk to children and young people is reviewed at regular intervals. The use of chronologies has become well embedded within recent months and they are now used effectively by social workers as a working tool.

38. Case recording is clear and coherent and files reviewed by inspectors were mostly up to date. Case files reflect regular and consistent management oversight, with well recorded case directions for workers to follow to ensure the focus of their work is well targeted on the needs of the child.

Leadership and governance

39. Leadership and governance arrangements are **good**. The investment and thoughtful deployment by the council of substantial additional financial resources has significantly strengthened service provision. The council and its partners now offer an impressive range of front line services, including early intervention services. The council's own child protection services have been enhanced by the establishment of 33 additional social work posts, and robust commissioning arrangements ensure that any service gaps are identified and addressed. For example, CAMHS has been recommissioned so that it is widely available to children and young people across the full range of services, including early intervention services.
40. Strong collaborative working arrangements are in place with partners across both preventative and protective children's services. Several examples have been seen by inspectors of effective partnership working at a strategic level and this provides the model for successful operational working. For example, satisfactory arrangements are already in place with police partners for the joint investigation of child protection enquiries, with firm plans to further develop these through a multi-agency safeguarding hub. This initiative includes existing health and voluntary sector partners, such as the Domestic Violence Children's Officer commissioned from Victim Support. Joint arrangements are also securely in place for the assessment and support of young people missing from home where they are considered to be at risk of being trafficked or sexually exploited, although the capacity to join these up and consider them as multiple and complex cases is as yet underdeveloped.
41. A comprehensive suite of planning documentation is in place. The Children's and Young Person's Plan (CYPP) demonstrates ambitious high level target setting against long-term goals. The annual review and action plan of the CYPP and service level plans each have short-term, achievable outcomes which ensure the effective implementation of the long-term plan. Following a peer review, quarterly 'report cards' have recently been introduced for each service area to ensure that progress against planned priorities is being routinely monitored and updated, and services to children continuously improved. Although there is some evidence of their contribution to significant performance improvement, their introduction has been relatively recent and their full impact is as yet limited.
42. The Local Safeguarding Children Board meets its statutory requirements well. Meetings are well attended by partners and the council has retained its commitment to funding the Board. Its effective independent Chair has

restructured its sub-committees to ensure that the Board is proactive and provides a challenging environment for partners. The Board has developed an ambitious business plan, to which individual members offer high levels of energy and commitment. This commitment includes the voluntary sector and schools who, when spoken to by inspectors, were very positive about the achievements of the Board and their role in it as full partners. The Board offers a comprehensive, fully accessible and highly valued training programme to the multi-agency workforce. It has suitable arrangements in place for convening serious case reviews (SCRs), although this has not recently been necessary. Arrangements by the Board for performance monitoring and quality assurance have been developed more recently and have yet to show their full impact.

43. Robust arrangements are in place to ensure that senior officers of the council are suitably accountable to elected members on children's services issues. A regular cycle of meetings, including scrutiny panel, ensures that elected members maintain an overview of performance and the efficient use of resources. In addition, regular meetings take place between the DCS, the Chief Executive and the political leadership, to ensure that they are appropriately briefed on issues such as critical incidents and cases causing concern. A committed and conscientious Lead Member for Children's Services maintains a detailed overview of his portfolio through regular meetings with senior managers and staff and an impressive programme of visits, which provides him with frequent face to face contact with children.
44. Political leaders and senior officers within the council communicate regularly with the independent Chair of the LSCB; both on an individual basis and through occasional, formal meetings. This ensures that they have access to an independent view on the performance and effectiveness of services to children. The Chair is also a member of the Children's Trust Partnership Board, which provides effective governance to early intervention strategies and initiatives. This ensures that the formal governance arrangements of the boards are joined up at a strategic level.
45. Performance management within children's services is firmly established, and is underpinned by detailed strategies such as the quality assurance strategy, which is supported by a broad range of quality assurance resources, processes and tools. High level performance management information is used well for monitoring purposes, and has formed the basis of recent, significant performance improvement. According to the council's own figures, all key indicators are showing a positive trend. The DCS chairs a fortnightly performance board in which a range of performance information is appropriately drawn together and themes identified. Several examples of this approach were seen by inspectors, to be delivering effective performance improvement in an efficient and timely way. However, action planning to address deficits in performance is sometimes insufficiently measurable, and front line managers do not have

routine access to a suite of management information that would enable them to compare and contrast their team's performance over time against other teams or comparator authorities. This makes it difficult to determine how positive change is to be monitored, evaluated and maintained. For example the collated outcomes of IST interventions would potentially benefit from more detailed evaluation of their effectiveness as part of the Borough's overall preventative strategy.

46. The quality of social work supervision is consistently good and social workers spoken to during the inspection feel well supported and have on-going access to their managers. Management oversight of cases is effective with managers giving clear case direction following supervision of their staff, and several examples of robust individual performance management were seen by inspectors. Case directions are responded to appropriately by social workers and they ensure that work is well-targeted and focused on the protection and welfare needs of the child. Management challenge leads to improved assessment and planning for children and young people. Supervision files seen by inspectors were sound, and all staff spoken to during the inspection say that they feel well trained. However, although evidence gathered by inspectors indicates that reflective group supervision takes place, the benefits to children and young people is not always well evidenced on those case files reviewed by inspectors.
47. Strong evidence has been seen by inspectors of effective partnership working with children and young people and their parents at an individual case level. Consultation takes place across a range of services such as children's centres and disability services, where it has resulted in significant positive change in the provision of short breaks. However, the approach on the majority of these consultations is to collate responses to the council's proposals, rather than taking a participative approach to shaping strategic priorities and improving outcomes for young people.
48. A strong learning culture is in evidence throughout the council and its partners to which considerable value is added by the post of Principal Social Worker. The postholder has, for example, positively influenced initiatives on reflective group supervision and led to the introduction of innovative 'one minute guides' for staff on key processes. The council and its partners can also demonstrate learning from other sources such as from other local authorities' SCRs and from the adoption of an 'evidence informed practice' strategy, in partnership with national research organisations. This ensures that social workers have access to current research findings on which to base their assessments and reports. The council continues to produce an annual self-assessment of their progress against the recommendations of Ofsted inspection reports, and can, for example, demonstrate significant changes to the organisation and management of early help. This includes the establishment of seven dedicated CAF co-ordinators as a result of the recommendations of

Ofsted's unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in 2010.

49. Effective workforce planning is underpinned by a detailed workforce strategy supported by a suitably SMART action plan, and is a significant strength of the organisation. Robust arrangements are in place for the recruitment and induction of newly appointed staff and these have produced a strong, committed, stable workforce in which morale is high. The council's own monitoring indicates that the social care workforce is suitably reflective of the area's diverse population. Comprehensive arrangements are in place for the support, mentoring and continuing professional development of newly qualified social workers, including a reduced caseload. All members of staff, including agency staff, are able to access a comprehensive training programme which provides a wide range of learning opportunities in line with both organisational requirements and a training needs analysis that meets their individual learning needs. By funding additional posts while maintaining thresholds for service the council has ensured that social workers have manageable caseloads, which facilitates the delivery of direct work, allowing them to know the children on their caseload well and to improve the quality of their recording.

Record of main findings

Local authority arrangements for the protection of children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers	Good
The quality of practice	Good
Leadership and governance	Good