

# London Borough of Ealing

## Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

and

## Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board<sup>1</sup>

Inspection date: 13 June 2016 to 7 July 2016

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<b>Children's services in Ealing are good</b>		
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		Good
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>		Good

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

## Executive summary

Children's services in Ealing are good. Senior leaders and elected members show aspirations, passion and commitment to improve children's lives. Building on the safeguarding and children looked after inspections of 2011, services continue to be good and some, such as those for care leavers, are outstanding.

Corporate parenting is outstanding, showing real passion, ambition and creativity to ensure that children reach their full potential. The regular and effective engagement with children by leaders and elected members is central to service development and enhances their knowledge of front-line practice. Corporate parenting responsibilities are well embedded at all levels across the partnership. Leaders are ambitious to develop services further through the implementation of the 'Brighter Futures' programme. This intensive multi-agency working is showing early signs of success and has been well received by staff, children and families.

Performance management is strong at strategic and operational levels. Management oversight, monitoring arrangements and supervision provide clear guidance to workers regarding progression of actions and timescales. However, the local authority does not systematically collate and analyse data on the numbers of children and families attending child protection conferences and core groups, whether advocacy is offered and accepted, and the impact of these experiences. Alongside this, child protection conference chairs are not able to show clearly how they escalate concerns and what impact this has for children and families.

Senior managers are taking effective action to improve the recruitment and retention of staff. The local authority works with Frontline, a social work training agency, and offers 'Step up to social work', both of which support the recruitment of newly qualified social workers. Ealing also collaborates with other London boroughs to address high numbers of agency workers through measures such as pay capping. Many of Ealing's agency workers have been in post for several years due to the high staff morale, manageable caseloads and the valued supervision and support from managers.

Children and families benefit from a wide range of early help services. Referrals to the Ealing children's integrated response service (ECIRS) are managed effectively with thorough assessment of risk, clear decision making and management oversight. There is a good range of support services for children and families living in households with domestic violence, mental health concerns and substance misuse. Thresholds are well understood and applied across partnerships, but arrangements to investigate allegations of abuse or poor practice against professionals are not sufficiently robust. Notifications of private fostering arrangements are low, and activities to raise awareness have had limited impact.

Strong partnership working ensures that multi-agency practice is strong in addressing the needs of children missing from home, care or education, at risk of

sexual exploitation, radicalisation, gang affiliation and female genital mutilation. The profile of children at risk of child sexual exploitation is well understood, with interventions and disruption activities carried out alongside awareness raising within local communities. The quality of return home interviews is too variable.

Effective multi-agency working supports families on the edge of care. When children become looked after, decisions are appropriate, based on thorough assessments and with effective and timely use of legal planning meetings and the Public Law Outline. Permanence planning commences swiftly for those children who cannot return home, with regular management oversight to prevent drift and delay. Children who do return home do so after thorough assessment and planning, and with support.

Effective social work practice, which is monitored and overseen by managers, is leading to good outcomes for children. Children are seen regularly, listened to and their wishes and feelings are well recorded. However, in a small number of cases, social workers are not spending enough time with children to develop trusting relationships.

Despite mainly good outcomes for children, assessments and plans show some variation in quality. Diversity is not always well explored and most plans are not sufficiently specific, timely or focused on outcomes. The quality of child permanence reports is improving, but many do not contain relevant and detailed information for children to gain a real sense of their birth family and history.

The needs of children looked after are well met for those children living in or outside of the borough. Health needs are addressed well. The psychology service for children looked after has a real impact on improving children's emotional well-being. Most children live in stable, well-supported placements. However, two thirds of children looked after live outside of the borough, due to a shortage of foster carers. The Horizons education and achievement centre is outstanding in assisting children to transform their lives and increase their knowledge and skills, aspirations and self esteem. The centre offers an accessible, inclusive safe haven for children looked after and care leavers for as long as it is needed. Some work of the virtual school team with designated teachers in schools is exceptional in improving outcomes.

Adoption services are good, with staff being tenacious in pursuing adoption for children. Matching is well considered, but too many children move in with adopters without a life story book or later life letter and do not understand the reasons why they cannot live with their birth families. Post-adoption support is a strength, with good support offered to children, adopters and birth families.

Services for care leavers are outstanding. Staff remain in touch with large numbers of care leavers and most care leavers live in suitable accommodation. Health needs are addressed and high numbers are in education, employment and training. Care leavers gain independence skills, succeed and become role models, learning mentors and advocates for others. Their voice is clearly heard and incorporated into service delivery.

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## The local authority

### Information about this local authority area<sup>2</sup>

#### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates two children's homes. Both were judged to be good at their most recent Ofsted inspections.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in May 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in May 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.

#### Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since August 2015.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services and public health services.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since April 2016.

#### Children living in this area

- Approximately 80,700 children under the age of 18 years live in Ealing. This is 22.7% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 23% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 14.5% (the national average is 15.6%)
  - in secondary schools is 17.0% (the national average is 13.9%)
- Children from minority ethnic groups account for 64.5% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children in the area are Indian and Black African.
- The proportion of children who speak English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 64% (the national average is 19%).
  - in secondary schools is 54% (the national average is 15%).

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<sup>2</sup> The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data, where this was available.

- Sixty-one per cent (32,573) of pupils in Ealing schools do not speak English as their first language.

### **Child protection in this area**

- At 31 March 2016, 5,536 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 6,219 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 March 2016, 306 children were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 364 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 March 2016, nine children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from 11 at 31 March 2015.
- Since the last inspection, nine serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted, one serious case review has been completed and one was ongoing at the time of the inspection. The local authority is contributing to two serious case reviews in other local authorities.

### **Children looked after in this area**

- At 31 March 2016, 372 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 46 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 355 (44 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2015.

Of this number:

- 219 (or 58.9%) live outside the local authority area
  - 27 live in residential children's homes, of whom 74% live out of the authority area
  - four live in residential special schools,<sup>3</sup> of whom all live out of the authority area
  - 256 live with foster families, of whom 59.3% live out of the authority area
  - eight live with parents, of whom one lives out of the authority area
  - 24 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
    - there have been 11 adoptions
    - 24 children became the subject of special guardianship orders

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<sup>3</sup> These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

- 233 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 13.3% subsequently returned to be looked after
- one young person ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
- 12 children ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

## Recommendations

1. Improve the designated officer arrangements to investigate allegations of abuse or poor practice by professionals.
2. Ensure that all assessments and care plans are of a consistently high standard and that care plans are easy for children to understand.
3. Improve the quality of children in need and child protection plans so that they are sufficiently thorough and detailed to enable children and their families to understand what they have to do to achieve positive outcomes.
4. Ensure that when children go missing from care, return home interviews are consistently well recorded and that the information gathered is used effectively to safeguard children, both individually and collectively.
5. Ensure that social workers spend enough time with children to develop positive and trusting relationships, and that changes of social worker are kept to a minimum.
6. Improve children's participation in child protection conferences and core groups by strengthening advocacy arrangements. Collate feedback from families, children and child protection advisers about the effectiveness of the help provided to further strengthen and inform practice.
7. Improve awareness raising of private fostering across the partnership and wider community.
8. Ensure that all children are helped to understand and make sense of their personal histories and the events that led to them becoming looked after, including through timely life story work.
9. Ensure that there are sufficient numbers of foster carers, with the right skills, knowledge and experience, to meet the current and future demand for foster placements.
10. Ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are sufficiently rigorous so that important issues such as allegations against professionals and private fostering arrangements are fully reviewed.



## Summary for children

- Services for children in Ealing are good, and the service for care leavers is outstanding.
- Managers and council leaders are determined to provide good services for children and families, and they are doing a good job.
- When people report that they are worried about children, staff act quickly to help keep children safe.
- Most social workers meet children regularly and spend a lot of time with them to find out what their lives are like and what worries them. This helps social workers to make the right decisions for the children whom they work with.
- Children and families get the help and support that they need when they are not managing well or are having difficulties.
- Social workers, police officers, teachers, foster carers and many other people all understand what they need to do to keep children safe if they go missing or if they are at risk of sexual exploitation.
- When children cannot live at home, the right decisions are made by social workers. Children are placed with people who look after them well and help them to do well in their education and hobbies.
- The Horizons centre is excellent at helping children to succeed in education, and to develop skills and interests. Young people help and support each other. They make friends, feel safe and have fun.
- Senior managers and leaders are outstanding 'corporate parents'. This is because they meet regularly with children to hear about what works well and what needs improving. They are interested in children's lives and do whatever they can to help children to do well, stay healthy, learn and enjoy themselves.
- Social workers work hard to find the right family for children who can no longer live with their own families. Some children do not have enough information about their life stories when they are adopted or are placed away from home.
- Young people leaving care receive an outstanding service. Staff keep in touch with them to provide plenty of help and support to keep healthy, stay in education or find a job. They help them in finding somewhere to live which is safe and offer support in learning how to live independently and manage their own lives.
- Managers and leaders want to improve services further, with workers from different backgrounds such as health, education and youth work all working well together in the same teams to help children and families.

<b>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Most children and their families are helped to achieve positive outcomes due to effective and well-coordinated services. Well-embedded and wide-ranging accessible early help services, reflecting the diverse needs of local communities, provide well-targeted help and support.</p> <p>Children referred to social care are appropriately and effectively managed by Ealing children’s integrated response service (ECIRS). Information sharing is timely and risks are assessed well. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides thorough analysis and decision making for higher-risk referrals.</p> <p>Thresholds are well embedded and applied consistently in most cases, leading to proportionate action to protect children. Management decision making and oversight are strong. Timely and clear direction provided to staff ensures that drift and delay are avoided, in most cases. Social workers build strong relationships with children and engage them in purposeful activity.</p> <p>Timely, thorough and effective multi-agency action is taken to safeguard the large majority of children who are considered to be at risk of significant harm. Assessments are of high quality and capture children’s views well, but the analysis and impact of diversity are more varied. The majority of plans are not sufficiently thorough or detailed. However, effective oversight by the professional network and managers ensures that, for most children, positive outcomes are achieved.</p> <p>Effective arrangements are in place to tackle child sexual exploitation and children who are missing from home and school. Work to protect children from female genital mutilation is strong and at the forefront of national practice developments.</p> <p>Arrangements to respond to 16- and 17-year olds at risk of homelessness are well understood and implemented effectively.</p> <p>The small number of children known to the local authority who are privately fostered are comprehensively assessed and supported. However, arrangements to raise awareness across the partnership have not been sufficiently well targeted.</p> <p>Arrangements to investigate allegations of abuse or poor practice by professionals are not sufficiently robust.</p>	

## Inspection findings

11. The local authority and its partners have invested in prevention and early intervention services. This is making a significant and positive difference in improving outcomes for many children and their families. There is a wide range of early help support available to families when needs are first identified, which is delivered well by a range of services. These include the family intervention service, the early help and 'Supportive action for families in Ealing' (SAFE) teams, the family nurse partnership and children's centres.
12. Children's centres offer a range of highly effective services, including bespoke parenting programmes that have been adapted to meet the needs of a diverse community. Parents are very positive about the difference that this has made.
13. 'Think family plus' (TFP) is Ealing's response to the 'Troubled families' initiative, and during the first phase was reported to be successful, with 880 families 'turned around'. The TFP employment offer supports two Department of Work and Pensions co-located work coaches who offer pre-employment support, as well as proactively matching individuals with job opportunities. This work is valued by colleagues and is highly effective in assisting parents to find work, with all the associated benefits of employment.
14. The majority of early help assessments and plans (EHAPs) are timely, concise and reflect the family history and reason for referral. The best assessments seen capture the experience of the child well, though a few fail to reflect the child's wishes and feelings fully. In a small minority of cases, targets and timescales resulting from early help assessments are not sufficiently clear. Numbers of early help assessments increased by 13% between 2014–15 and 2015–16. The local authority monitors usage and targets training for those agencies currently not completing early help assessments.
15. The SAFE service is comprised of multiple agencies working in a collaborative manner, with the family at the centre. The service incorporates a range of professional perspectives to intervene in an effective, transparent and non-stigmatising manner at the earliest opportunity, in order to prevent children's needs escalating. This is proving to be successful, resulting in a decrease of 33% in referrals from SAFE to children's social care from 2014–15 to 2015–16. In cases tracked and sampled by inspectors, the level and complexity of work within these teams is high. The local authority is aware of this and is seeking additional resources to enhance the support offered.
16. The well-established Ealing children's integrated response service (ECIRS) manages referrals into social care effectively. Information sharing is timely and understanding of thresholds is well embedded across local partnerships. Thresholds are consistently applied and proportionate action is taken to protect children.

17. A systematic, clear, risk assessment process is consistently applied in ECIRS, with cases prioritised as blue, green, amber and red. Daily management decisions on all enquiries and referrals, 'step up' of lower level enquiries and 'step down' to SAFE and other early help services are thorough and appropriate. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) functions effectively and efficiently to process and manage the amber-rated cases. The contributions of experienced police and health colleagues, who provide a clear overview of all referrals for children and families, are particular strengths. Decision making by managers for the highest 'red' risk cases is immediate, leading to transfer within 24 hours to the locality teams, ensuring that children are safeguarded appropriately.
18. Arrangements to investigate allegations of abuse or poor practice by professionals are not sufficiently robust. Thresholds for referring to the designated officer are not consistently well applied or understood across the partnership or within social care. Alongside this, mechanisms to monitor performance in this area are under developed. Inspectors found a lack of management oversight, fragmented case recording and a poor quality annual report. (Recommendation)
19. Outside of working hours, a well-organised emergency duty service is in place, staffed by experienced social workers. Appropriate responses to child protection matters are progressed and there is effective coordination with daytime services.
20. Social workers build positive and consistent relationships with children. They see children regularly and alone, and direct work is purposeful and sensitive. Social workers report that they are well supported and have access to relevant professional expertise and training to undertake their work effectively. Caseloads are manageable. Management oversight is thorough and clearly recorded. Supervision notes detail progress against actions to keep cases on track. Within the multi-agency support team (MAST), group consultation and supervision arrangements enhance management oversight.
21. In cases where children are considered to be at risk of significant harm, child protection enquiries are timely and proportionate. Strategy meetings for the large majority of children are held promptly and there is routine use of complex strategy meetings for children subject to sexual exploitation or going missing. 'Step up' decisions to progress to initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) are timely and based on consultations with child protection advisers. During 2014–15, 79% of ICPCs were held within 15 days of section 47 enquiries starting, which is similar to statistical neighbours (78%) and London (71%). For a few children in cases seen, strategy meetings and timeliness of section 47 enquiries were subject to some delay, but this did not have a significant impact on outcomes.
22. For the majority of children and their families who are subject to child protection plans, risks decrease and good outcomes are achieved. This is due

to strong multi-agency working, regular statutory visits to children, and good engagement by professionals and parents at core groups and conferences. Staff and managers are persistent in their attempts to work with families who are harder to engage and consider how to respond differently or overcome cultural differences.

23. Performance data reflects that fewer children are becoming subject to child protection plans. Current figures show 306 children at 31 March 2016, compared to 364 at 31 March 2015, which is a similar number to statistical neighbours. The percentage of children with a second or subsequent plan is also decreasing. Recent scrutiny by a quality assurance panel of child protection plans that are open for longer than 18 months is helping staff to focus on improved outcomes.
24. Child protection advisers (CPAs) are experienced, and offer a consistent and timely service to children and their families. The number of child protection cases reviewed within timescales was 100% in quarter three of 2015–16. Conferences are well managed and the strengthening families approach has led to better parental engagement.
25. Arrangements for getting feedback from children and families regarding the effectiveness of the help that they have received or their experiences of child protection conferences are under developed. Few advocates are used to assist children in participating at conferences and core groups. Escalation of professional issues and challenge from CPAs are individually progressed but not centrally collated, therefore trends and patterns regarding practice issues are not fully known. (Recommendation)
26. Children and families who are subject to child in need or child protection plans benefit from appropriate and extensive services which mitigate against domestic violence, drug and alcohol and adult mental health issues. Specific domestic violence workers undertake direct work. Strong practice in the SAFE team of continuing to work with adults, even if risk escalates to a child in need or child protection level, offers continuity and the chance for family behaviours to change. There is effective use of specialists to focus on 'skilling up' the social care workforce by sharing practice and expertise.
27. For the large majority of children, high-quality assessments are timely, use historical information and routinely capture their views. Families are well engaged and understand what is expected of them in order to evidence change in behaviours. Some assessments are less strong, as they fail to address individual needs and lack analysis or engagement with families.
28. The majority of plans are not sufficiently thorough or detailed to address the actions and work needed to improve outcomes effectively. Cases show a lack of contingency planning, detail or specific, measureable and timely actions. Despite this, oversight by the professional network and managers ensure that,

for most children, positive outcomes are monitored, tracked and subsequently achieved. (Recommendation)

29. Children are well protected by strong and effective partnership working. Regular attendance and participation at all levels of the child protection system inform decision making, information sharing and joint planning. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), and other partnership groups are very well attended. Staff show commitment to collaborate and share expertise to manage risks and improve outcomes for children and families.
30. Arrangements to support children with disabilities are comprehensive. The co-location of education, health and other specialist services enables positive information sharing. Child protection thresholds are well understood and applied. Investigations are completed within the team to ensure consistency of worker as well as management oversight. In most cases, assessments and plans are of adequate or better quality, with timely reviewing mechanisms in place. The intensive therapeutic short-breaks service is a particular strength. This work ensures that children on the edge of care and their families receive well-targeted support and a break, as well as advice on coping strategies and behaviour management techniques.
31. New ways of working with children and their families within the MAST teams make a positive difference to outcomes. For some children on the edge of care, the multi-agency approach and intense work had achieved positive change, where previously no improvements had been made.
32. Significant progress has been made to tackle child sexual exploitation and to respond to children who go missing from home. Children who are missing are appropriately and effectively identified. In cases seen by inspectors, return home interviews were used effectively to reduce risk and inform planning.
33. Swift identification, robust monitoring and tracking are in place for children who go missing from school. Reporting by schools is clear and processes are thorough. The large majority of children missing education for significant periods of time are located promptly and accounted for. Where serious concerns are expressed by schools or the local authority, protocols are well known and cases accelerated to the ECIRS and, ultimately, the children missing multi-agency panel, if necessary.
34. Currently, 185 children are being electively home educated. The local authority has tight procedures in place, and schools make notifications as soon as they are aware that children are being removed from school to be home educated. Data is routinely updated and scrutinised by the 'children missing from education' team. Guidance is issued to all home educators, and families are encouraged to cooperate and engage, particularly with regard to health and safety and safeguarding procedures. Most parents cooperate with the

initial home visit, but if there are concerns about the safety and well-being of children the local authority takes swift action to address them.

35. The recent appointment of a child sexual exploitation and missing coordinator has been effective in improving awareness of child sexual exploitation in the community, and particularly with schools.
36. Children who are at risk of sexual exploitation are properly supported and protected by the use of complex strategy meetings, risk assessments and multi-agency plans. A strong and committed multi-agency sexual exploitation (MASE) panel works well to ensure that child sexual exploitation is appropriately profiled and that children are safeguarded effectively. Governance arrangements are appropriate. There are strong links with the police, youth service and MARAC, including detailed and specific work linking child sexual exploitation with gang members and activities. This results in good information sharing and a well-coordinated and fast response to identified risks. For example, the police were effective in closing down a local hotel known to be a hotspot for child sexual exploitation.
37. Work to protect children from female genital mutilation is strong, effectively prioritised and at the forefront of national practice developments. Data reporting by health professionals is well embedded and 150 school staff are now trained. Awareness raising is beginning to show positive results, as police referrals have increased to 15 in the last year.
38. Children who are privately fostered are comprehensively assessed and supported. A coordinated, multi-disciplinary response to private fostering is delivered through the private fostering development group. While responses regarding individual children are mostly robust, arrangements to raise awareness across the partnership and wider community have not been fully developed. For example, independent schools, hard-to-reach community groups and some faith groups have not been sufficiently targeted. The annual report on private fostering is not comprehensive and does not report on performance information, for example the timeliness and quality of assessments or the frequency of social work visits. It also fails to provide a good analysis of the effectiveness of awareness raising. (Recommendation)
39. Arrangements to respond to 16- and 17- year olds at risk of homelessness are set out within a clear protocol. Thresholds are well understood, and young people receive a swift and decisive response to their need for accommodation. Most young people are placed in supported accommodation with on-site assistance available.
40. The population of Ealing is highly diverse and there are higher numbers of children from minority ethnic groups with children in need plans and child protection plans. Professionals are aware of this and understand that this is due in part to the complex needs of new families arriving in Ealing, large families within some cultural groups and the impact of deprivation.

41. Within the work seen by inspectors, there was variable practice in the understanding and analysis of the impact of diversity. For some children, it is strongly and sensitively reflected, with the use of interpreters and community links to enhance workers' understanding of different cultural backgrounds. Conversely, for other children, the impact of culture and religion, family and community beliefs are not fully explored. In some cases, the lack of availability of interpreters delays the progression of work. Identity issues for White British children are not well explored or recorded.
  
42. The partnership approach to prevent children from being drawn into terrorism is well established. Cases referred to the 'Channel' panel are appropriate and show that connections are being made to child sexual exploitation, children going missing, female genital mutilation and gang involvement. For cases not deemed appropriate for 'Channel', consideration is given to referral to the vulnerable adolescents panel. All referrals are assessed in the ECIRS by staff who have training in identifying and responding to risk. The schools adviser for 'Prevent' works effectively with schools to support early identification of risk.



**The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence**

**Good**

**Summary**

Children are well looked after, whether they live in Ealing or are placed elsewhere. The local authority is delivering improved health, education and emotional well-being outcomes for children.

Arrangements to safeguard and protect children on the edge of care are effective. Good use is made of the Public Law Outline to effect change or, where it is not possible for children to live safely with their birth parents, to secure permanent alternatives for them with minimum delay. Thresholds are applied appropriately. Children do not become looked after unnecessarily.

Most children live in settled, stable family placements, are seen regularly and are listened to. Care plans, which are informed by children's wishes and feelings, are regularly reviewed. The vast majority of reviews are timely, with high levels of participation by children. Children are helped to understand their rights and know how to complain.

Foster carers talk very positively about the support and supervision that they receive, particularly from the psychology service for children looked after which, by providing effective wrap-around support, is helping to increase placement stability. However, a shortfall in local foster placements means that currently two-thirds of children looked after are living outside of the borough.

The quality of assessments and care plans is variable. The impact of diversity in the lives of children is not always fully explored and life story work is not always timely. In a small number of cases, the quality and timeliness of management challenge, including the challenge provided by independent reviewing officers, are not sufficiently rigorous or robust. Return home interviews are not consistently well recorded.

The two Children in Care Councils are lively, well established, have extensive reach and are increasingly influential.

The local authority is tenacious in pursuing adoption for children where this is considered to be in their best interests. Progress in achieving permanence is robustly monitored. Assessments of prospective adopters are thorough and clearly identify what applicants have to offer children who need adoptive families.

The support that care leavers receive is outstanding. The vast majority of care leavers live in suitable accommodation, are supported to develop their independent living skills, are encouraged to aim high and to do well in education, employment or training, and have comprehensive information about their health histories.

## Inspection findings

43. The vast majority of children become looked after as a result of timely and proportionate decisions based on a thorough assessment of their needs and circumstances, and then only with the explicit approval of a senior manager. The legal planning panel maintains rigorous and effective management oversight, regularly and systematically reviewing progress to avoid drift or delay. Only those children who need to be looked after come into care.
44. The Public Law Outline is used effectively and well. Legal planning meetings carefully consider whether and when to initiate legal proceedings. Pre-proceedings letters are clear and unambiguous, ensuring that parents and carers understand the issues and concerns, as well as the likely consequences, if change is not achieved.
45. Good use is made of family group conferences to explore family-based solutions for children and families. The kinship team promptly assesses extended family members or friends as potential long-term carers for children who are unable to live safely with their birth parents. Early planning for children includes consideration of special guardianship and child arrangement orders. Parallel plans are used well to ensure that children achieve permanence with minimum delay.
46. Social workers produce good quality assessments and reports which are accepted by the courts. Effective working relationships with the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), the family courts and the local family justice board, and good use of legal case managers have enabled the local authority to reduce the average length of care proceedings. In quarter four of 2015–16, the average length of care proceedings was 28 weeks, two weeks shorter than the London average. This means that children are not waiting longer than is necessary for key decisions to be made.
47. When children return home, either following a period of accommodation under section 20 or as a result of a decision made by the court, they do so with good support and effective safeguards in place. Reunification is a product of thorough assessments and careful planning including, in most cases, comprehensive contingency planning. In the vast majority of cases, these placements are successful, and few children become looked after for a second time.
48. Most children looked after are seen at regular intervals in line with statutory guidance. Social workers use a range of different methods to communicate with children in order to make sense of what they are thinking and feeling. Children's wishes and feelings are well recorded. However, foster carers have noted lack of continuity for some children in teams which have experienced frequent staff changes. Additionally, some social workers are not spending enough time with children in order to get to know and understand them properly. On occasion, this leaves children feeling isolated or alone. The local

authority is addressing this with its continued investment in the Brighter Futures programme, which includes a reduction in social workers' caseloads and thus provides more time for developing relationships with children. (Recommendation)

49. Children, including children with disabilities, are helped to understand their rights, know how to complain and have ready access to good quality advocacy support. In 2015–16, 59 children were supported by advocates to participate in their reviews. The local authority takes children's complaints seriously. Although most complaints are resolved informally, the corporate parenting panel carefully considers the implications for policy and practice of the lessons learned from complaints.
50. Strong partnership working between schools, the youth service, children's social care, foster carers and placement providers ensures that children are safeguarded and protected from bullying, including cyber-bullying, homophobia and hate crime.
51. Good awareness of child sexual exploitation, and the risks associated with children going missing from care mean that, when issues and concerns are identified, strategy meetings are used effectively to share information and develop appropriate protective responses. However, although return home interviews are being offered and/or completed in the majority of cases, they are not being consistently well recorded. Recognising this, the local authority has set up a group to consider how best to record return home interviews and collate and use the information generated by them. (Recommendation)
52. Whether they live in the borough or elsewhere, children looked after who misuse substances receive appropriate help and support. Last year, 36 children looked after and care leavers were identified as needing an intervention ranging from targeted advice to a treatment programme.
53. The number of children looked after who are in receipt of a custodial sentence has fallen from 5% in 2013–14 to 3.5% in 2014–15. All but one of the 10 young people who are currently serving custodial sentences became looked after by virtue of their age at the point at which they were remanded. While they are in custody, young people receive good support. A dedicated worker for children looked after in the youth justice service ensures that there are good links and regular communication with social work teams.
54. The local authority and its partners are conscientious in ensuring that the health needs of children looked after, regardless of where they are living, are identified and addressed. The timeliness of initial and annual health assessments (92% and 97% respectively), dental checks (92%) and immunisations (94%) has improved significantly. A monthly health panel, attended by health and social care representatives, ensures that the individual health needs of children looked after are monitored and tracked effectively.

55. The local authority is equally responsive to the emotional well-being and mental health needs of children looked after. Ninety-four per cent of strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are completed within timescales. Team managers are required to review, at regular three-monthly intervals, the case of every single child looked after to identify whether they have any significant, unmet emotional needs. The multidisciplinary SDQ and emotional well-being panel (SEW) use this information to ensure that children, looked after in Ealing or elsewhere, receive a timely and effective response. Waiting times for access to child and adolescent mental health services in the borough are good, at between six and eight weeks maximum.
56. The educational progress and attainment of children looked after are given a high priority. The virtual school head provides strong strategic leadership. The virtual school is effective in monitoring, tracking and promoting the attendance, progress and attainment of children looked after. Some of the work done by the virtual school team with designated teachers in schools for children looked after, both in and out of the borough, is outstanding. This ensures that there is a strong focus on improving outcomes for children looked after. Headteachers speak very highly of the quality of training, support and guidance provided by the virtual school team and the difference that it is making.
57. Attainment at key stage 2 is strong, particularly in mathematics and reading, and the gap between children looked after and their peers has narrowed. This is now in line with all children nationally. Children do less well at secondary school. This is largely because a disproportionately high number of children looked after aged between 14 and 16 years require significant additional learning support in response to identified special educational needs or, having come in to care later, have complex emotional and behavioural needs. As a consequence, the numbers achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics are low. A clear strategy is in place to improve attainment at key stage 3 and key stage 4.
58. The virtual school head closely scrutinises the use by schools of the ring-fenced pupil premium plus grant. This ensures that the funding is used appropriately, and often creatively, to motivate children and target their specific learning needs.
59. Nearly all children looked after attend good or better schools. Excellent recording and monitoring systems not only rigorously track progress and achievement, but also record attendance. Close attention is paid to punctuality and absences, ensuring that there is a swift response if, and when, concerns arise. Current data shows consistently high levels of attendance by children looked after, in and out of the borough.
60. Those children who cannot attend a mainstream school are placed in a range of alternative provision. Robust commissioning arrangements and regular visits by local authority officers ensure that all such provision is rigorously

quality assured. All children have at least 25 hours of education per week, unless there are clearly assessed reasons for a more bespoke programme of education.

61. The quality of personal education plans (PEP) is good or better in most cases. Most children looked after already have a PEP. Plans are in place to ensure that, by the end of the 2016 summer term, every child or young person, from early years to key stage 5, will have a PEP.
62. The highly successful 'My education' mentoring scheme is encouraging increasing numbers of care leavers to become learning mentors to younger children in care. Inspired by the success of care leavers, many of whom are studying at university, children are encouraged and supported to believe in themselves, aim high and develop the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed.
63. Children looked after are encouraged and supported to participate in social and recreational activities. Where necessary, the local authority provides additional funding, over and above the child's element of the fostering allowance, to enable children, for example, to join the cadets or take up boxing.
64. The large majority of children live in stable family placements. Most placements are of a good standard and are meeting children's needs. Delegated authority is clearly addressed in children's and young people's initial placement plans. The percentage of children who have had three or more placement moves within the last 12 months has fallen from 11.7% in 2013–14 to 8.5% to the end of December 2015.
65. The Connect team, which works intensively with children looked after, provides good wrap-around support to placements, particularly to those involving children with complex needs or whose behaviour can be challenging. Currently, 71 children have a named worker from the psychology team for children looked after. Many more are being helped indirectly, as a result of the training that the team provides, and the individual and group consultation that it is able to offer. Foster carers speak very positively about the Connect team and the support from the psychology service, and are able to give practical examples of their impact.
66. The quality of care plans, and of the assessments on which they are based, is variable. Half of those seen by inspectors required improvement. Recognising this, the local authority is in the process of reviewing its childcare planning template. Care plans are subject to regular scrutiny by one of two panels, one focusing on children looked after and the other on care leavers. This ensures that the quality and effectiveness of placements and packages of support are being continuously monitored. Although placement disruptions, including disruptions involving adoption placements, are relatively rare, learning from them is systematically used to inform future practice. (Recommendation)

67. Social workers actively ensure that, in most cases, contact with parents, brothers and sisters and extended family members is carefully assessed, well-maintained and reviewed appropriately. However, some foster carers are critical of the level of communication with the supervised contact centre, not least because of the potentially devastating impact on children when parents or brothers and sisters repeatedly fail to turn up for pre-arranged contact visits.
68. Lack of sufficient local foster placements, particularly for brothers and sisters and older children, means that two-thirds of the looked after population are living out of borough. Currently, too many children looked after are living away from their home area. (Recommendation)
69. Processes and procedures for the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers are robust. However, although the local authority is making good use of the skills, knowledge and experience of existing foster carers as part of a fostering recruitment campaign, none of the 56 expressions of interest that this has generated to date has progressed to an assessment.
70. Foster carers are well supervised and supported. They speak very positively about the support that they receive from their supervising social workers, particularly at times of crisis. Foster carers, including kinship carers, have good access to a comprehensive range of high-quality training. This includes, for example, training on nurturing attachment. Annual reviews are timely and robust. The retention of foster carers is good.
71. The local authority is rigorous in its pursuit of permanence for children, in whatever shape or form that might take. The legal planning panel routinely reviews the case of every child who has come into care as part of a voluntary agreement eight weeks after they become looked after. The permanency panel ensures that permanency plans are robust and that progress in achieving permanency is maintained. The number of cases identified by the permanency panel, where there are concerns either about the robustness of the permanency plan or about the speed with which permanency is being achieved, has fallen from 29 in May to 17 in June this year.
72. A group of strong, committed and experienced independent reviewing officers act as passionate advocates for children and, in most cases, offer appropriate challenge. The timeliness of reviews is good, as is the level of participation by children. In the period April to December 2015, 94.6% of reviews were completed on time. By the end of February 2016, that figure had risen to 97.5%. In the year to date, every child who is old enough to do so had participated in their review.
73. In a small number of cases, the quality and timeliness of management challenge, including the challenge provided by independent reviewing officers, are not sufficiently rigorous or robust. On occasion, this has contributed to drift or delay. Additionally, life story work is not always timely, which makes it

difficult for some children to understand their long-term plan or why they are in care. The local authority has taken action to address this. In October last year, it organised a conference for social workers, foster carers and independent reviewing officers on the importance of life story work in preparing children for independence. (Recommendation)

74. The two Children in Care Councils are strong, dynamic and influential. This reflects the excellent support and encouragement that the 'Junior Council' and the 'Horizon's Shoutout Council' receive. As well as undertaking a survey involving over 140 children, the results of which are being used to shape and inform the development and delivery of services, both councils have been actively involved in developing age-appropriate information for children about their rights and what it means to be looked after.
75. The impact of diversity in the lives of children is not always fully explored. In some cases where children are living in residential or foster placements which do not reflect their ethnic and/or cultural background, insufficient consideration is given to making sure that they are helped to develop a rounded understanding of their heritage and identity.

<p><b>The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good</b></p>
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76. Adoption is considered for all children unable to return home to their families. This includes children over the age of five years, brothers and sisters, children from minority ethnic groups and those with complex health needs. Eleven children were adopted during 2015–16, which is a slight increase from the 10 adoptions during 2014–15. Ealing is one of eight London boroughs and two voluntary adoption agencies that constitute the West London adoption and permanence consortium. Numbers of adoptions remain low across the consortium but, within this, Ealing has achieved the second highest number of adoptions for the past two years.
77. The number of children leaving care on special guardianship orders has risen over recent years, but dropped to 22 during 2015–16. This is a reduction from 2014–15, when 33 special guardianship orders were granted. Although this figure is declining, it mirrors the increase in the number of older children becoming subject to care proceedings. During 2015–16, 13 children aged 15 or 16 years became subject to care proceedings, compared with only one in the same age group during 2014–15. These older children are less likely to be considered for adoption or other permanence options.
78. Adoption managers effectively monitor children with an adoption plan through six-weekly permanency planning meetings. These commence as soon as an adoption plan is considered at the second looked after child review or, in some cases earlier, if there has been recent involvement with the family.

79. The local authority has been successful in recruiting a range of adopters with diverse backgrounds to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. Twenty-four adopters were waiting for a match at the time of the inspection, and some of these are second-time adopters with Ealing. A recruitment strategy has recently been revised and targets adopters willing to take children who are 'harder to place'. Adopters are prepared and trained to a high standard, with the prospective adopter reports (PARs) evidencing a consistently high quality of assessment. The needs of previously adopted or birth children in the family are fully considered. Panel reports show that, for most cases, timescales for completing the two-stage assessment process are not met, but most are prolonged at the request of the prospective adopters or due to delays in receiving checks from abroad. Adopters who spoke to inspectors were positive regarding their experience of adopting through Ealing. Despite having a choice of nearby boroughs to approach, many adopters said they would recommend Ealing to others.
80. Adopters are well supported by the adoption team while they wait for the right match. The use of the 'Adoption Register' and 'Link Matters' are promoted to increase adopters' potential for a match. 'Foster to adopt' and concurrency are discussed with every adopter as part of their assessment, and a small number are willing to consider 'foster to adopt' arrangements. The first 'foster to adopt' placement since 2013 was made during the inspection, with a further two matches planned. Post-approval training is also provided to enhance adopters' understanding and ability to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.
81. Managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to securing adoption, and are tenacious in seeking placements for older children, brothers and sisters and those with complex needs. At the time of the inspection, five children were waiting to be matched. Of these, one child had a parallel plan for reunification and a family group of three had a potential match. Adoption social workers take a lead role in family finding and have a comprehensive knowledge of those adopters waiting. Due to the complexity of some children's needs, it can take some time to secure a successful match, but social workers do not give up in their efforts to find families.
82. The adoption scorecard for 2012–15 shows that children in Ealing waited on average 517 days between entering care and being placed for adoption. This is better than the England average of 593 days, but is 30 days outside of the national scorecard threshold of 487 days. Performance figures reflect the time that the local authority takes to find families for those children who are 'harder to place'.
83. In the period April to December 2015, 75% of children were adopted within 12 months of being placed for adoption, which is an improved figure from 66.7% during the previous year. The latest published figures for 2012–15 show that the average number of days between the local authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match was 200 days. This is



better than the England average of 223 days, but outside of the national threshold of 121 days.

84. Child permanence reports (CPRs) are variable in quality. The local authority has taken steps to improve this by introducing a new report format in January 2016, along with training for social workers. Experienced adoption team social workers offer advice to social workers on completing CPRs and this, combined with effective quality assurance from the independent panel adviser, is having a positive impact.
85. Matching between children and adopters is thorough, with matching reports and support plans of a high quality. Managers monitor the progress of matches through supervision, with reasons for any delays clearly recorded. Life appreciation days assist adopters to gain and understand children's histories and their needs. This preparation ensures that adopters feel equipped and supported to meet the challenges of placements. The low numbers of disruptions suggest that matching is effective.
86. Seven children have had a decision changed away from adoption during the past year, and all were appropriate.
87. In cases seen by inspectors, not all children were well prepared for adoption. Examples were seen of creative direct work being completed by some social workers, but delays in providing life story books and later life letters are not assisting children and adopters to understand children's histories and the reasons why they cannot live with their birth families. In one case of an older child, the lack of a life story book had an impact on the adopter's ability to answer some fundamental questions for the child, resulting in additional support being required from the adoption team. The adoption team is compensating for the lack of life story books and later life letters by completing these as part of support packages. Some examples seen of life story books and later life letters were of a high standard, with information provided in an accessible format for children. (Recommendation)
88. Post-adoption work is a strength in Ealing. The local authority has made a number of successful applications to the adoption support fund to secure funding for commissioned services such as therapeutic support. The adoption support team assists families waiting for services by the use of educational psychologists, mentors for adopted children and funding for respite care. At the time of the inspection, Ealing was supporting 40 adoptive families and using the services of 18 providers. Adopters spoke highly of the support received and of the level of communication from the local authority throughout the process.
89. The local authority also supports 136 'letter box' arrangements, with the adoption support team helping birth families to produce letters when required. Ealing also commissions a service providing an outreach surgery once a month

for birth families requiring advice and support, as well as adults who have been adopted.

90. The adoption panel is well managed, appropriately constituted and with a diverse membership who bring a range of knowledge and skills to the meetings. The independent panel adviser provides information and challenge, where needed, and feedback from adopters and workers attending panel contributes to the panel's quality assurance process. The panel chair provides six-monthly reports to the local authority; these provide a comprehensive overview of panel activity and learning points regarding cases presented.

**The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is outstanding**

91. Services for care leavers in Ealing are outstanding. Care leaving staff maintain a clear focus supporting care leavers to make decisions about their lives that will keep them safe and will help them achieve their full potential. The team is experienced and culturally diverse, reflecting the cohort of young people well. Staff convey real passion and pride in their work and in the young people whom they serve. Strong relationships between staff and young people are built on mutual respect and trust. This is borne out by the fact that the service is in contact with all but two care leavers. Young people talked enthusiastically about the high quality of care and help that they had received from their key workers and personal advisers. One 20-year-old said: 'The workers are awesome. Nothing is too much trouble – they really get how I feel and how things don't always work out for me.'
92. Most care leavers are in suitable accommodation and are receiving excellent advice, support and guidance to help them move positively towards independence. High numbers (68%) of younger care leavers are choosing to stay in care at their 18th birthday and currently 28 are requesting to stay put with their foster carers.
93. Pathway plans are comprehensive and are very well targeted. Risk is carefully assessed to ensure that care leavers feel safe and stay safe. Reviews are timely and plans demonstrate very good engagement of young people wherever they live in the country, each one ensuring that their wishes, feelings and aspirations are clearly expressed. Plans and assessments are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in circumstances and actions taken to address individual needs. Management oversight is robust and decisions are regularly scrutinised by managers in supervision and in reflective practice sessions, which workers value highly.
94. Care leavers' health needs are thoughtfully and frequently reviewed. A minority have highly complex needs and high-level resourcing has been

provided by the borough to ensure that these individuals receive the most appropriate care, and that transitions into adult services are clear and efficient. Planning for transition to adult services is very well managed and has been further enhanced with quarterly professionals meetings to review each case forensically, to ensure that the best outcomes can be achieved. A growing number of care leavers have mental health needs. In response, the service has worked diligently to ensure that young people have very good access to a range of health and well-being services, including targeted psychology, therapeutic and counselling services.

95. Health needs are considered consistently in reviews and assessment meetings, and services are very well signposted and used. For example, care leavers are aware of and access local genito-urinary medicine clinics, drug and alcohol services and family planning clinics when necessary. Care leavers have been actively involved in the review of a health passport. A care leaver summary has been added to the health records of all care leavers, and this provides young people and future health providers with a clear and concise overview of young people's health needs throughout their journey in care.
96. Care leavers are routinely encouraged to aim high and to do well in education, employment or training. The local authority is highly ambitious for its care leavers and its ongoing commitment to significant funding contributes to very good outcomes for a growing number. In 2014–15, of 214 care leavers aged 19 to 21 years old, 62% (132) were in education, employment or training (EET). This is higher than comparators and the national average of 48%. Of these, 20% (43) are still in higher education. This is high, and well above the national average of 6%. This is set to improve further in the next academic year.
97. Vocational programmes have also been prioritised and an increasing number of pre-employment training schemes are available to care leavers through the local authority. These are highly effective in preparing care leavers for apprenticeships and further training. Ten care leavers are currently in apprenticeships in the borough, three of whom are with the local authority, and all have completed pre-employment courses prior to accessing apprenticeship placements. Forty-seven care leavers are unaccompanied minors and are taking courses in English as a second language or access to learning programmes at local colleges.
98. The local authority closely monitors those care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), including those who live outside of the borough. Thirty-three per cent (70) were reported to be NEET, which is below its comparators and the national average of 39%. All those who are NEET are closely tracked and, where possible, signposted to the post-16 virtual school teacher and the personal adviser at the Horizons centre for individual support, advice and guidance. They are encouraged to participate in bespoke programmes brokered through Horizons and delivered by training providers locally so that they can improve their functional skills in English and

mathematics and, ultimately, access to employment. Care leaver learning mentors work as influential advocates and positive role models, particularly with the NEET cohort, encouraging their peers to follow their example and to get involved. One 21-year-old care leaver said: 'It's really good that I can turn up here (at Horizons) at any time, including the weekend, and someone will be there to listen to me or make me a drink and help me sort out a problem.'

99. Key workers attached to semi-independent housing in and out of the borough are also very active in supporting those who are NEET to plan towards positive outcomes.
100. Very good work is undertaken by the access and resources team of the local authority to find the right accommodation match for care leavers in and out of borough. The large majority (81%) of 19- to 21-year old care leavers are in suitable accommodation including foster care and semi-independent housing, and independent living with tenancies, supported lodgings or supported hostels. New foster placements for care leavers are more difficult to find, even though demand remains high. The remaining care leavers (19%) are either in custody or are no longer requiring accommodation. No one is in bed and breakfast accommodation. Risk and protective factors regarding a young person's safety and well-being are given precedence in the decision-making process, and workers go to great lengths to ensure that every young person is safe and protected from potential harm. Care leavers have a choice of accommodation, but this is negotiated to ensure that risks and needs are addressed. Houses of multiple occupation are closely monitored and risk assessed, with regular announced and unannounced visits. Those care leavers who have been at risk of sexual exploitation are moved to a location away from potential risk and where they will receive structured support. Seven had recently been removed from the child sexual exploitation risk matrix as a result of successful interventions by the team and partner agencies.
101. Care leavers are encouraged to develop independent living skills through a range of supportive life-skills programmes. Managing money, learning to run a home and developing cooking skills, for example, are compulsory elements of programmes delivered by accommodation providers across a range of settings. Additional programmes are offered through the Horizons centre and all care leavers who are eligible to receive a council tenancy must attend the compulsory money management scheme, where they learn budgeting, bidding for and managing a tenancy, and using the leaving care grant. These activities ensure that all young people become more confident and competent as they move towards independent living. Young people noted the good support that they receive to manage their lives, and welcome the visits from their workers.
102. Care leavers understand their rights and responsibilities and use the advocacy service very well to complain if they have concerns, particularly when living out of the borough. They know their entitlements regarding assistance, such as bursary payments at college, and all are well supported financially into semi- and independent accommodation, apprenticeship schemes and when

they wish move on to higher education. They are encouraged to be curious, independent, and to challenge decisions and actions if they believe that they are detrimental to their well-being. Strong evidence of this was demonstrated in a number of pathway plans and in discussions with young people. Young people's views have been instrumental in developing a learning mentors' programme to ensure that care leavers have a voice and can act as advocates for others. Some have also become trainee youth workers to assist care leavers in holiday programmes and activities.

103. Care leavers' achievements are celebrated through the annual educational awards ceremony, where they receive awards for progress, achievement and special accomplishments. They are often requested to come to this event as motivational speakers. Their personal experiences and life stories are showcased at conferences in schools, youth centres and in events across the borough throughout the year. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors were very determined that their experiences should be shared with others so that services would continue to improve the life chances for all care leavers.

<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Effective political and senior leadership ensures the provision of high-quality social work intervention and services to meet the needs of vulnerable children. Services for children who need help and protection, children looked after and children who are adopted are good. Services for care leavers are outstanding. Senior leaders and elected members know the quality of frontline practice and are committed to improving services further through the implementation of the 'Brighter Futures' programme. However, arrangements for investigating allegations against professionals are not robust, and awareness raising of private fostering arrangements is not sufficiently comprehensive.</p> <p>The partnership is mature and communicates and collaborates well, leading to shared priorities and strong multi-agency practice. Established relationships between partner agencies enable a confident, strategic response to children at risk of radicalisation and extremism, sexual exploitation, gang affiliation and female genital mutilation.</p> <p>The local authority knows its community well and commissions a number of effective, accessible services and interventions to meet needs, ranging from early help to targeted approaches specific to the diverse communities in Ealing.</p> <p>The local authority is an outstanding corporate parent, ambitious, aspirational and proactive in championing the needs of children looked after and care leavers. Corporate parenting is highly effective, innovative and creative, and delivers real opportunities for children looked after and care leavers to aspire to and reach their full potential. Children are fully involved in decisions about services through active and meaningful engagement.</p> <p>There is a strong performance management culture. Data is used intelligently and forensically to understand performance. Management oversight is of sufficient seniority in relation to key decisions made about children. Management supervision of cases is strong and provides timely and clear guidance to workers, thus avoiding drift and delay. Effective support helps to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity. Lessons learned from representations and complaints improve policy and practice, informed by the experience of young people.</p> <p>The workforce feels valued and well supported. Staff report that the working environment, manageable caseloads and effective management support are the reasons why morale is high. Staff want to and are proud to work for Ealing. The diversity of the workforce is reflective of the local community.</p>	

## Inspection findings

104. The local authority is committed to providing the best quality services for children and families in Ealing and strong cross-party political and senior leadership ensures the provision of high-quality social work intervention and services to meet the needs of vulnerable children. The leader of the council, lead member for children's services, chief executive and the executive director for children, adults and public health are passionate and knowledgeable about issues for vulnerable children. Effective scrutiny arrangements hold officers and elected members to account for delivering high-quality, cost effective services.
105. There are established, aligned governance arrangements within the local authority and across the partnership that enable strong strategic ownership and rigour in understanding and addressing key areas of risk. The partnership is mature and communicates and collaborates well, leading to shared priorities and strong multi-agency practice.
106. The health and wellbeing board (HWB) uses a thematic approach that enables strategic leaders to prioritise children's issues in Ealing. The deputy chair of the HWB is the chair of the clinical commissioning group, demonstrating strong health commitment across the borough. The HWB receives an annual report from the schools survey to hear from children about issues important to them, such as online safety.
107. The Safer Ealing partnership board oversees effective links between children's services; Housing and Safer Communities; Violence Against Women and Girls; schools; and police. This provides a confident strategic response to children at risk of radicalisation and extremism, sexual exploitation, gang affiliation and female genital mutilation. Committed strategic leads for child sexual exploitation identify those children most at risk through a multi-agency problem profile and comprehensive performance management information. Effective interventions and disruption activity include using tenancy workers, park rangers, licensing applications, health and safety legislation and close working with colleagues in the Home Office.
108. A child sexual exploitation coordinator has improved the focus on awareness raising and consultation, particularly with schools, resulting in confident identification of risks. Support and training have increased the use of the risk matrix, and improved gatekeeping has led to a growing number of young people identified at risk being appropriately referred to the multi-agency sexual exploitation (MASE) panel.
109. A comprehensive children's chapter of the joint strategic needs assessment clearly identifies specific needs of Ealing's population and assesses the effectiveness and impact of services provided across the partnership. The local authority knows the local community well and commissions a wide range of accessible services and interventions to meet needs, from early help to more

targeted approaches specific to the range of communities in Ealing. This includes domestic violence intervention project (DVIP) perpetrator programmes; women and girls' specialist workers for those at risk or subject to sexual exploitation; Southall Black Sisters, which works with families who have no recourse to public funds; and the Somali youth crime project, which works intensively with young people involved in and at risk of gang-related activity. Commissioned services are effectively quality assured to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of children and families.

110. Work by the West London Alliance (WLA), led by a senior commissioning manager in Ealing, has been successful in improving the quality and quantity of services through effective collaboration. Successful brokering by WLA secured a competitive funding formula with independent fostering agencies that enabled 10 young people to remain with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements. This provides continuity and stability for young people.
111. The local authority is an outstanding corporate parent, and is ambitious, aspirational and proactive in championing the needs of children looked after and care leavers. The corporate parenting panel, chaired by the leader of the council, is highly effective, innovative and creative, and delivers real opportunities for children looked after and care leavers to aspire to and reach their full potential. Children are fully involved in decisions about services through active and meaningful engagement. This includes holding meetings at their venue, the Horizons centre, which enables a relaxed atmosphere in which to present their views. Children looked after who are placed out of borough also contribute and give their views directly to the chair of the corporate parenting panel via a video link. This has resulted in positive changes for children, such as improved contact arrangements between brothers and sisters.
112. The executive director is responsible for children's and adults' services and public health. This enables effective continuity in safeguarding across the three directorates. There are close links and joint working between the executive director, the director of children and families and the Ealing Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) chair through regular monthly meetings. The ESCB chair reports to the chief executive to ensure a clear line of sight and accountability for effective partnership working for vulnerable children in Ealing. A newly appointed ESCB chair has brought improved focus and priority to key areas of multi-agency practice.
113. There is a strong performance management culture. Data is used intelligently and forensically to understand performance across all performance indicators. A good and clear performance management infrastructure enables monthly data to be accessible to managers at team level to focus on key areas for improvements. This enables healthy comparison and shared learning of best practice between teams. However, key weaknesses are evident in the oversight of performance with regard to private fostering and the designated officer service.



114. Quality assurance arrangements require additional focus to ensure that shortfalls in practice are identified and acted upon. The quality assurance annual report 2015–16 comments on a full range of quality assurance activity, including external review and senior manager scrutiny. Identified areas for improvement appropriately reflect aspects of high risk practice areas, for example, child sexual exploitation and children who go missing, and encompass feedback from parents and young people. However, during the inspection, a small number of areas identified for development in an independent case file audit completed in March 2015 were still evident. These included better consideration of the impact of the child’s ethnicity, culture and religion, and reflective supervision in line with the supervision policy. In addition, oversight of the designated officer service has not been sufficiently comprehensive, meaning that senior managers were not fully aware of the lack of rigour in the service. (Recommendation)
115. Senior management oversight, provided through a number of panels, ensures sufficient seniority and accountability in relation to key decisions made about children. Management oversight of practice is evident in most cases seen by inspectors and provides timely and clear guidance to workers in progressing the case, thus avoiding drift and delay. Case management is generally well recorded, but not all records meet high practice standards by showing sufficient detail, analysis and focus on the child. A group supervision observed by inspectors evidenced consideration of theoretical models, practical ideas and reflection by the social worker, leading to clear guidance and actions to support the child and her carers.
116. Children looked after and care leavers know how to complain, and valued support helps to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity. Children have been instrumental in reviewing and producing high-quality information to support children looked after and care leavers to know and understand their rights and to make representation if they are unhappy. Information is available in Braille and Makaton for children with disabilities and in different languages, where required. Those who access the Horizons centre are encouraged to raise issues. Staff trained in conflict resolution and mediation ensure that a large number of complaints are resolved early. In 2015–16, almost all complaints were resolved at stage one. Lessons learned from representations and complaints inform quarterly reporting to the corporate parent panel, which considers policy and practice changes that are informed by the experience of young people.
117. Relationships between the local authority and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) are effective and positive. The district judge describes appropriate and timely care applications and good-quality pre-proceedings work. Social work statements and assessments are robust, resulting in reduction in the use of expert witnesses. Good international work, particularly with the Polish embassy, has reduced delays for Polish children where assessments of family or statutory international checks are required. Cafcass reports that the local authority is proactive and purposeful in case

management progression and, as a result, current performance has successfully reduced to 28 weeks in quarter four of 2015–16, compared to the London average of 30 weeks.

118. The recruitment and retention of permanent staff present a considerable challenge in Ealing. There is a clear commitment from the leader of the council to explore opportunities to address the need for affordable housing in the borough. In order to attract and retain local authority staff, a recent collaboration with a property developer has seen 28 affordable one-bedroom flats built for purchase by key workers in the area. This innovative and creative thinking has yet to demonstrate improved recruitment, retention, and workforce stability.
119. Numbers of agency staff in the borough are high, and a recently agreed 'memorandum of understanding' for 31 London boroughs puts effective measures in place to provide a consistent approach to standardising references, quality assuring the agency performance and capping agency rates. The workforce development strategy, 'Brighter Futures 2015–16', sets out the local authority's approach to reshape and redesign the social care workforce, with an emphasis on promoting a culture of listening to children and families, and working holistically with partners. Existing staff are enthusiastic regarding this new way of working and it is hoped that it will encourage staff to take up permanent positions.
120. The local authority fully supports an ethos of 'growing and nurturing' the skills and talents of their staff. For staff who meet the required level of competence and experience, the successful implementation of 'Brighter Futures' has produced opportunities to apply to be part of phase one of the programme. However, the transitional arrangements for staff in implementing 'Brighter Futures' has resulted in an imbalance between permanent and agency staff in posts. This has created some instability in teams and changes of worker for children.
121. There is a strong training and development culture. A comprehensive training and development programme is available for all social work staff. This includes the implementation of evidence-based training via the family partnership programme. The local authority is a key partner in Frontline, a social work training agency, and currently has two Frontline units in place, as well as supporting 'Step Up' students for the last four years. Support to newly qualified social workers through the assessed and supported year in employment is comprehensive, with progress checkpoints at three and six months being considered by a panel to ensure consistency. Managers attend workshops to enable effective oversight and support to newly qualified social workers, who report positively about the help that they receive, opportunities for co-working and learning from experienced social workers, and protected caseloads.

122. Staff feel valued and well supported. Members of staff who spoke to inspectors report that the working environment, manageable caseloads and effective management support are the reasons why morale is high. Staff want to work for Ealing and are proud to do so. The diversity of the workforce is reflective of the local community, and staff use their culture and ethnic origins to build effective relationships with children and their families.

## The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

### The Local Safeguarding Children Board requires improvement

#### Executive summary

The Ealing Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) requires improvement to be good. The board meets all of its statutory functions as defined in 'Working Together 2015' and, through its coordination of partnership working, has influence on frontline practice. It is appropriately constituted to include two lay members. However, it has carried out its monitoring function with a lack of rigour. This inhibits its ability to understand the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services fully and to ensure the coordination of all multi-agency safeguarding functions.

The board has recently appointed a new chair who has identified, with partner agencies, aspects of the work of the board that require improvement. This includes proposed consolidation of sub-group structures and, as a priority, revision of the annual report and business plan.

The ability of the ESCB to act as a 'critical friend' to partner agencies is compromised by insufficiently broad and rigorous performance monitoring and auditing arrangements. Although a new multi-agency dataset has recently been agreed, progress to develop this has been slow and requires refinement.

The inclusion of young people via a shadow board, 'Young Ealing Safeguarding' (YES), ensures that the child's voice is central to identifying and prioritising the safeguarding concerns of children, and is a significant strength. The board is active in ensuring that policies and procedures are in place, and that it influences the development of practice. These procedures include recent updates regarding female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty. The threshold guidance is used well and is embedded. Awareness raising regarding private fostering arrangements is not sufficiently strong. The ESCB provides effective leadership in tackling child sexual exploitation at both a strategic level and an operational level. This ensures that work focuses well on the most vulnerable children.

Training is well regarded by professionals, and is sufficiently broad and focused to improve practice. There is currently one serious case review (SCR) underway, and the board can demonstrate the effectiveness of action plans to improve practice through previous SCRs and learning reviews.

## Recommendations

- 123. Ensure that the annual report and business plan have a clear focus on: understanding and addressing local needs, a rigorous assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services, and evaluating progress made in achieving improved outcomes for children.
- 124. Establish a performance dataset that ensures that the board can measure progress against its key priorities.
- 125. Develop a sub-group structure that optimises current capacity, and is effective in monitoring and evaluating practice.
- 126. Ensure that multi-agency audits provide an effective overview of frontline practice and inter-agency cooperation to safeguard children. Audits should include frontline practitioners, managers and children to provide inclusive, comprehensive intelligence, and should be repeated to evaluate practice improvements.
- 127. Strengthen the oversight of private fostering arrangements to ensure that children who are privately fostered are identified and supported.

### **Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board**

- 128. The Ealing LSCB has very recently appointed a new independent chair who has been in post since March 2016. She has quickly undertaken an assessment of the board's current functioning and is working with partners to bring about improvement. The existing ESCB structure of 10 sub-groups presents a significant challenge to the stretched capacity of all partner agencies, therefore the consolidation of existing structures is a priority. Proposed changes are designed to address current shortcomings regarding the level of practice focus and critical enquiry. (Recommendation)
- 129. Governance arrangements between the ESCB and the local authority are well established, with the ESCB chair meeting regularly with the executive director for adults, children and public health and the chief executive officer to ensure that the authority is fulfilling its safeguarding responsibilities. The ESCB chair is a member of the health and wellbeing board, which helps to ensure that safeguarding children is appropriately considered and reflected within the joint strategic needs assessment.
- 130. The chair of the board has also been appointed to chair the Ealing adult safeguarding board and is proactively considering the opportunities this new arrangement may create to promote joint work. This includes 'Think family' initiatives, such as a coordinated approach to consider the impact of the 'toxic trio', thereby building resilience for children and their families. The ESCB is generally well attended by sufficiently senior officers from a wide variety of relevant agencies. Political oversight is strengthened with the lead member for

children's services sitting as a participating observer. Two lay members are involved at board and sub-group level.

131. Board members are committed to improving the life chances of children. Building upon mature existing partnerships, they give a high priority to safeguarding. A timely multi-agency review following the recent concerns regarding Medway Secure Training Centre, to ensure that young people from Ealing in secure settings were safe, provides a cogent example of a rapid, child-centred coordinated response. There is evidence of effective challenge. For example, following proposed changes to the school nursing service, assurances were sought to ensure an evaluation of the impact of attendance at child protection conferences. Similarly, when changes to health service arrangements suggested that health visitors would work in an increasingly remote manner from primary care services, robust intervention saw the development of a bespoke electronic communication system. This ensures that relevant health information is shared to safeguard children.
132. A considerable strength of the board is its financial support and engagement with a young people's shadow board known as Young Ealing Safeguarding (YES). This highly articulate, motivated and confident group of young people works with the board to promote and resolve safeguarding concerns of young people. The group itself has achieved commendable success in promoting issues pertaining to e-safety, female genital mutilation and grooming. The group is currently engaged in a programme 'to teach teachers how to teach personal, social and health education'. YES members reported to inspectors that they feel that they are listened to and that their contribution to the safeguarding agenda is important.
133. The annual report 2014–15 is too descriptive and does not present a sufficiently rigorous or transparent analysis of safeguarding activity across the borough. The report does not include a comprehensive range of feedback from the board, sub-groups and partners, nor does it pull it together into an overall assessment of the effectiveness of local services. This limits the report's usefulness as a tool to understand what works well and what needs to change. Although priorities are reflected in the accompanying business plan, the ensuing actions are insufficiently specific, measurable or time bound. At its most recent meeting, the board identified these failings. It has agreed, as a priority, to revise the annual report and business plan in July 2016 to ensure that there is clarity and appropriate focus for future safeguarding activity. (Recommendation)
134. Although the board has a rolling programme of section 11 audits, it relies too heavily on self-reporting, and has not always challenged agencies sufficiently to provide evidence on the basis for their declarations. The new chair recognises that more needs to be done to strengthen the cross-referencing of the section 11 audits, including through multi-agency audit findings, staff surveys and more rigorous scrutiny. The board undertakes some effective, albeit limited, deep-dive audits that are thematic. However, it does not

regularly undertake a broad enough range of multi-agency case auditing activities to assess the effectiveness of multi-agency child protection practice and inform the monitoring of local performance. A recent independent audit commissioned by the board was effective in providing assurance that thresholds at the 'front door' were embedded and appropriate. (Recommendation)

135. The dataset used by the board is being revised. It has previously been overly focused on children's social care and has lacked a broad range of data from other agencies to give a full picture of the difference that agencies are making for children and areas for improvement. Agencies are beginning to offer an accompanying narrative in order to provide a more qualitative analysis and an understanding of the story behind the data. This work has only recently begun, so it is too early to assess how effectively this will assist the board to monitor safeguarding practice. (Recommendation)
136. Board members have relied on reports and presentations to enable them to understand what is happening at the front line, given the limitations of the dataset. Frequent presentations, for example from early help services, have enabled them to keep up to date and, in some cases, information presented to the board has allowed them to identify gaps and areas for improvement or challenge. The lack of clarity about the effectiveness of safeguarding services which has resulted from the poor quality of the data has meant that the board has had limited influence on the planning and commissioning of services. This means that the board cannot influence the direction of improvement in a systematic way regarding priorities and identified gaps.
137. The board has undertaken a range of activity to ensure that it both influences and understands child sexual exploitation in Ealing. Work around child sexual exploitation has a sharper strategic focus, with better coordinated activity to pull together information, data and intelligence that is used to build up a picture of activity across the borough. Work with the clinical commissioning group, police and the Safer Ealing Partnership has improved understanding, awareness and effective multi-agency practice. This has enabled a focus on those children who are the most vulnerable.
138. The education sub-group of the board provides a good conduit for raising concerns, disseminating information and sharing good practice between schools and board partners. Its scope has recently been strengthened following proactive liaison with a high number of link officers.
139. The board has developed a local learning and improvement framework for statutory partners which sets out how it will monitor and review practice, and capture learning to improve service provision. The board has a standing panel to monitor and review critical incidents and consider if the criteria are met for a serious case review (SCR). It also assesses whether other action short of a full SCR should be taken to address concerns about practice. During the course of the year, the board participated in an SCR led by the tri-borough of

Westminster City Council, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Immediate concerns regarding transience and the transfer of cases cross-borough were quickly recognised and acted upon. A child practice review was also carried out, following a disclosure from a teenage girl that she had consumed a noxious substance. An action plan has been developed to raise awareness of escalation policies, and to recognise the capacity and limitations of agency practice. The implementation of the plan is regularly reviewed by the SCR sub-group. More recently, the board has decided to conduct an SCR following the death by suicide of a young person. It is too early yet to identify and capture the associated learning.

140. Social workers spoken to during this inspection were positive about the broad range of training provided by the board. During the period between April 2014 and March 2015, over 60 courses took place, involving over 1,200 attendees. Training is responsive to changing needs, and trainers incorporate lessons from SCRs and other learning into current programmes. Training is evaluated using the pan-London three-point evaluation methodology. The training sub-group recognises that this is not working well and it remains an area for development. Awareness of safeguarding issues across partners and the local community is supported by a range of information published by the board, including through its accessible and informative website.
141. The child death overview panel undertakes reviews appropriately. The panel has a group of trained professionals who are available to undertake home visits following a death. Cases are reviewed in a timely way, and good information sharing means that decisions can quickly be reached about the preventability of deaths. Trends are analysed and causes of deaths are broken down into relevant categories such as age, gender and postcode. A review of all deaths led to active awareness raising, regarding safer sleeping.
142. The board has adopted pan-London LSCB policies and procedures, which are localised when necessary and reviewed regularly. These are accessible via the ESCB website. The threshold document has recently been revised to reflect changes in policy and priorities, for example female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty. Generally, thresholds are well understood and consistently applied. The creation and update of the 'yellow book' is a commendable achievement. This book details the safeguarding roles and responsibilities to be used by all organisations and groups in the voluntary and community sector, including faith-based organisations. It is of note that other local authority areas have adopted this approach, and ESCB has been happy to share learning.
143. The board has not been monitoring agency performance effectively in safeguarding children in private fostering arrangements. While there has been some awareness raising activity, this has not led to an increase in identifications or referrals. (Recommendation)



## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This includes children who are looked after, and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of nine of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and one additional inspector.

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