

Inspection of Haringey local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 13 to 24 February 2023

Lead inspector: Claire Beckingham, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Leaders have supported frontline staff to significantly improve practice since the last inspection. Particular progress has been made for children in need of help and protection. Multi-agency partnership work is effective in identifying children at risk of abuse or neglect and providing the right support at the right time. Children at risk of extra-familial harm benefit from bespoke, timely and targeted support to protect them and to disrupt exploitation. Care leavers continue to receive effective help to take up education and employment opportunities and prepare for adulthood. Personal advisers are tenacious and creative in supporting them as young adults.

While most children are now supported well, leaders know there is more to do to achieve the same level of progress in developing services for children in care. Children come into care when it is in their best interests and most live in homes which meet their needs. However, practice is not consistently enabling them to achieve the stability and permanence they need for the future. Many do not receive individualised, sensitive life-story work to help them understand their journeys.

Leaders have an accurate and realistic view of the service. Stability of senior leadership and good corporate and political support have helped Haringey make

considerable progress in a challenging context. The transformation seen is making a positive difference to most children's lives.

What needs to improve?

- The effectiveness of permanence planning for children in care, including the challenge brought by independent reviewing officers.
- The identification of and response to children in private fostering arrangements.
- The provision and quality of life-story work at key developmental stages in children's lives.
- The quality of supervision in ensuring that plans for children make a positive impact.
- The understanding and knowledge of frontline workers about adoption.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good

1. Services for children who need help and protection in Haringey are strong. Thresholds for intervention are understood across the partnership and by practitioners in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Children and families get the right level of help and protection at the right time, making a positive difference to their day-to-day lives and reducing the risk of harm.
2. Children benefit from a well-coordinated range of early help services that effectively support families with a wide range of complex and difficult issues. Judicious, targeted investment in reconfigured locality-based teams results in early help that is carefully prioritised to support potentially vulnerable families. Early help assessments provide clarity about needs; the strongest assessments are detailed and explorative. Staff are great advocates for families. Workers use a wide variety of tools to work creatively with adults and children, building relationships in which trust is established.
3. Children are appropriately safeguarded from harm when necessary. Enthusiastic, experienced MASH practitioners and managers provide sensitive, child-centred and timely responses and interventions. Skilled and sensitive work by MASH social workers, including speaking directly to children, ensures that decisions are informed by a good understanding of their lives.
4. Co-location and joint working between health, education, police, children's social workers and early help professionals strengthens practice. Information about past harm and risk informs decisions and leads to proportionate action. The importance of parental consent is well understood, and appropriately overridden if needed. Management oversight of MASH work ensures that children's experiences are central to timely decisions about the steps needed to help and protect children from harm.

5. In response to findings from rapid reviews and case reviews, leaders' recent decision to appoint a hospital social worker is positive. This expedites decisions and referrals about vulnerable children and pregnant woman at risk.
6. Well-established systems in the out-of-hours emergency duty team (EDT) ensure that children receive a prompt service. The relationships and reporting arrangements with day services are effective and children are safeguarded appropriately. The EDT has access to dedicated fostering provision, which ensures that children in custody do not have to wait for extended periods of time in police cells before accommodation is found.
7. Although variable in quality, most assessments identify the impact for children of parental mental illness, domestic abuse, substance misuse, exploitation and neglect. This is an improvement from the previous inspection. The impact of poverty, racism, poor housing and fuel debt is understood, but this does not detract from focusing on harm and risk to children. Stronger assessments across social care teams and in early help are detailed and provide a thorough analysis informed by children's views and those of partner agencies. However, some children who need longer-term help and protection do not move on from the assessment teams quickly enough, resulting in some drift. Leaders had initiated action before this inspection to ameliorate this problem; by creating additional assessment teams, they have been increasing capacity to complete timely assessments.
8. Children who are supported through child in need (CIN) or child protection (CP) plans benefit from diligent and persistent workers who focus on reducing risk and are effective in improving outcomes for them. A culture of listening to children, understanding their world, and acting on their views is becoming increasingly embedded in practice across teams and is leading to proportionate interventions. Appropriate action is taken to safeguard and protect children who are at immediate risk of significant harm. Most CP conferences are timely. Multi-agency core groups and CIN meetings are held regularly, and most are used effectively to review and update plans. However, some plans lack clarity about risks, desired outcomes and timescales. Where this is the case, progress is not consistently measured against or continuously evaluated in supervision.
9. When children's circumstances or risks change, workers appropriately escalate or step down the level of service and support they need. Where concerns are very serious, concurrent work for children subject to the Public Law Outline (PLO) is preventing drift and ensuring timely decisions about applications to family courts. Targeted and timely work with families presented to the PLO multi-team decision panel is also successfully diverting families from court. Work to strengthen PLO processes and the introduction of a proceedings tracker have helped managers strengthen their grip on what is happening. The judiciary receives effective support from Haringey's legal team. Workers complete viability assessments of extended family members if assessed risks indicate that children are unable to live safely with their parents, although the quality and timeliness of these assessments are inconsistent.

10. Strong multi-agency communication ensures that effective arrangements are in place for identifying and responding to disabled children and young people, helping to protect them from harm and ensure that they are appropriately cared for.
11. The need to improve the identification and awareness of private fostering arrangements was noted at the last inspection. This has not been addressed quickly enough and work in this area remains underdeveloped. Haringey has only identified an unexpectedly small number of children in such arrangements, and practice lacks rigour and management oversight.
12. Senior leaders have aligned information to better monitor and assess the impact of work with vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of exploitation. The Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation team provides intensive wraparound support that reduces risks to children who go missing or who are at risk of exploitation. Professionals identify risks to young people early, by using screening tools and swiftly sharing information with multi-agency partners. All children who have gone missing are offered return home interviews, but this is not always robustly followed up when children decline to take part.
13. Diligent work across the partnership, for instance in the 'gangs' meeting and collaboration with 'Prevent' and Channel, is protecting children who are vulnerable to extra-familial exploitation and radicalisation. Sophisticated, individualised direct work by highly skilled practitioners in the early help exploitation team is helping children to understand risk and develop ways to avoid harmful situations. In some cases, workers are not always using appropriate, non-victim blaming language in reports about vulnerable and exploited children.
14. Young people who present as homeless have their needs carefully considered by social workers in collaboration with housing officers. Workers help them to return home with support or to move to alternative provision. Children and families who present as destitute receive a responsive service from the No Recourse to Public Funds team. They do not have to wait until the outcome of an assessment before being provided with support and financial provision. This ensures that children's needs are met quickly.
15. Local authority designated officer decisions demonstrate appropriate understanding and application of safeguarding thresholds. Effective systems help managers track all open referrals, ensuring that decisions are timely. The designated officer has rightly identified the need to strengthen recording in cases where police investigations are lengthy.
16. The local authority has put clear systems in place to satisfy itself that children who are being educated at home are being safeguarded.

17. Designated safeguarding leads in schools value the opportunities they are given to network and meet. They understand when to contact partners about safeguarding concerns. Sometimes they are not updated on subsequent social work actions as quickly as they would like.

The experiences and progress of children in care: requires improvement to be good

18. When children need to be looked after, appropriate decisions and timely actions are taken to secure their safety. Decisions are well informed by accurate assessments of children's needs. Most children live in homes which meet their needs, where they are settled and supported by their carers to make progress. However, some children have experienced repeated placement moves or have not been able to achieve permanence in a timely manner. When it is not possible for children to return to the care of their parents, there is consideration of family and friends to care for children. There continues to be some variability in the quality and timeliness of assessments of potential carers.
19. More progress is needed to improve the effectiveness of matching and timeliness of securing permanence for children. Some children in care have experienced drift and delay. For some of these children, there has been insufficient consideration of matching based on their needs, and this has made it harder for them to settle and make progress. Some children have remained on court orders when they are no longer necessary, and others have not been formally matched with foster families with whom they have lived for significant periods of time. Some older children with very complex needs have experienced multiple moves despite careful matching.
20. Social workers are creative and committed to helping these children overcome trauma and in trying to mitigate the impact of these moves, sometimes becoming the child's most constant relationship. Recently, systems and plans have been developed to improve matching and permanency, but these are not fully embedded to ensure that all children benefit. Recent permanence planning and matching for some younger children leaving care through adoption has been more effective.
21. Decisions for children to return home, live with family friends or to be cared for by extended family are informed well by thorough parenting and specialist assessments. Manager oversight and scrutiny of these arrangements is not yet regular enough to ensure that these plans remain the most appropriate for children.
22. Children's care plans are variable in quality. Stronger plans reflect consideration of children's voices, views, cultural, religious and language needs and provide clear outcomes and timescales to achieve these. Weaker plans are not routinely updated to reflect current circumstances or situations and tasks are not achieved in a timely manner. Plans are regularly reviewed. A 'child-led' approach positively empowers children to be active participants in their reviews.

Children's views are captured well and mostly reflected using language that is purposefully chosen to empower children and challenge any stigma associated with being in care. Children and families can use interpreters when needed, which helps their views to be heard. Some children have experienced delays in the progression of their plans. Independent reviewing officer oversight is not consistently effective in addressing this problem.

23. Children are seen regularly by their workers. Some children receive direct work to explore their histories, journeys or individual stories. However, some have had too many social workers and a lack of focused and meaningful visits. Not all children have access to advocates and independent visitors.
24. Life-story work is underdeveloped and has been absent for too many children in care. Operationally, there has been limited understanding about the importance of this work to enable children to make sense of their identities, stories and histories at different stages of their development. Leaders have appropriately recognised this gap and training is planned.
25. Children experiencing, or who are at risk of, exploitation are supported well through impactful work which improves their safety. Meaningful interventions provided by direct intervention workers help to divert children and young people away from gang affiliation and criminal activity. There is good oversight of children who go missing from care, with appropriate review of risk and timely return home interviews to ascertain the reasons for their missing episodes and to inform future planning for them.
26. Culturally sensitive work with unaccompanied minors makes a difference to their lives, helping children to settle, access health and education, and live in homes which meet their needs.
27. Disabled children are supported well by social workers who have a detailed understanding of their needs, know how best to support them and help them voice their views about the care they receive.
28. Children's health needs are assessed at least annually and appropriate referrals are made to specialist services. The local authority and its partners have improved access to services to meet the emotional and mental health needs of children living in or near to Haringey. Children are supported to attend dental and optician appointments when needed.
29. Children who live in stable homes are encouraged to develop their interests and hobbies. When children move placement, some experience delays in attending an appropriate educational setting. Social workers cannot easily source appropriate education, training and employment support for children who have had several placement moves.
30. Children are supported to safely maintain their relationships with people who are important to them. Where possible, they live with their brothers and sisters; when they don't, they are actively supported to spend time with each other

when this is in their best interests. Children are prepared for family time and their social workers consider carefully how it meets their needs.

31. Designated safeguarding leads in schools play a key role in ensuring that children and young people in care get a good deal. They are well supported by other partners, including social workers and the virtual school team. Evidence of impact can be seen in children's improving attendance levels and achievement, a reduction in suspensions from school and a decrease in the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training. The virtual school service provides relevant training for social workers, foster carers and designated leads. Considering the challenges that many pupils in care face, more can still be done to support better educational outcomes, especially for those in primary school and older pupils in key stage 4.
32. Almost all personal education plans (PEPs) are completed in a timely way. Most of these plans contain measurable and meaningful steps for each child. However, some have gaps in the educational history of the child, for example in how they achieved at the end of primary school. Some PEPs do not give sufficient emphasis on careers guidance and support, especially for children coming to the end of their secondary schooling. The virtual school is working on a new development plan.
33. Recruitment of foster carers is an improving picture. Recruitment in the last year has increased the number of foster carers available. Foster carers receive a high level of support from their supervising social workers. Support for connected carers is not implemented soon enough. The training offer for foster carers is good; however, it is not clear how many carers have taken up training to ensure that they remain skilled and up to date to meet children's needs. The First Steps team supports foster carers with trauma-informed help and strategies to understand and respond to children's behaviours. The quality of assessments and annual foster carer reviews is improving. A backlog of out-of-timescale reviews has built up, so that oversight of foster carers has not been as robust as it should be. Leaders had recognised this prior to the inspection and had deployed a reviewing officer, who has returned the outstanding reviews to panel.
34. Haringey has been part of the Adopt London North regional adoption agency (RAA) since October 2019. These partnership arrangements are serving Haringey children well. The RAA has a good understanding of children's needs, and the local authority has good oversight of the RAA's work. However, leaders and managers rightly recognise that there is a lack of understanding among frontline teams about adoption.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

35. Social workers and personal advisers supporting care leavers are dedicated to and knowledgeable about their young people. They provide practical help and

support to young people which helps them in times of challenge, difficulty and success.

36. Social workers and personal advisers keep in touch with young people and offer the support that they need, when they need it. They visit young people regularly to develop trusting and caring relationships. This includes young people in custody.
37. Nurturing, enduring and stable relationships support and enable young people to share painful information, so the right help can be provided. Workers maintain regular communication, sometimes daily, with their young people in warm, enthusiastic messages. Visits are well recorded; they are meaningful and explore issues that impact on individual young people.
38. Social workers and personal advisers are inquisitive about young people's vulnerabilities, and they understand the impact of trauma and adverse life experiences on their health and well-being. They work proactively to support young people with complex needs, doing all they can to support and prepare them for the next stage of their journey into adulthood. This includes helping young people to access therapeutic services. Personal advisers are persistent in finding them these resources, regardless of where young people are living. Young people have access to specialist mental health services when these are needed. Group therapy is also available, as is family therapy when family relationships need strengthening.
39. The timing of, and rationale for, decisions to allocate a personal adviser rather than a social worker are not always clear to young people. This can make it harder for some to see how they will be supported at important transition points in their life and when to anticipate a change in worker.
40. When a young adult turns 21, their needs are assessed and, through consultation with their personal adviser, they decide whether they want ongoing support from the local authority. If the young person does not want ongoing support, then workers keep in touch with them twice a year. If their circumstances change, or they change their mind, they can be reallocated a personal adviser.
41. The local offer for young people is well understood by social workers and personal advisers, who regularly share details with young people so they understand their rights and entitlements. This is explicit in young people's records. However, some care leavers informed inspectors that they did not know about all of their entitlements.
42. The majority of young people have good-quality pathway plans. Most plans are co-produced with young people and are comprehensive, providing information about needs, entitlements, and practical information about their finances. The plans detail how young people's needs will be met and include contributions from young people about their views to inform their plans for housing,

employment and education. When young people choose not to contribute to their plan, workers ensure that they record the young person's wishes. A minority of plans lack focus and detail on actions to support young people to develop independence.

43. Pathway plans focus on education and employment. The help young people receive is enhanced by thoughtful and practical support from tenacious workers who help them act on careers advice. Plans are not identifying early enough when young people aged 16 and 17 are not on track to achieve in their mathematics or English courses. Young people have access to a wide range of support to gain employment skills. This includes help to apply for credible apprenticeships and education programmes. Young people are also supported through the work of the aspiration panel, promoting a whole-system response to their education and employment needs. Young adults who are at university are supported with accommodation and additional finances, as well as practical advice and guidance for other needs.
44. Care leavers who are parents are supported well with practical help, advice and plans that reflect their own needs as well as their child's. This approach helps them to parent more safely. Strong multi-agency support and communication improve outcomes and reduce risk for parents and their children.
45. Young people's health needs are assessed prior to them becoming 18, and actions to improve their health are explicitly considered in their pathway plans.
46. Workers consider housing options and suitable pathways before young people reach 18 so that the right accommodation and support can be planned. Support to apply for benefits is also provided by a dedicated Department of Work and Pensions worker deployed within Haringey's services. Most young people live in areas of their choosing where possible, in accommodation they choose and which is adequate and meets their needs. Semi-independent accommodation with easy-to-access support is available to help young people develop their independence skills. This is further strengthened through young people having access to independence skills workshops and a Money Matters programme. 'Staying put' arrangements are encouraged and widely available for young people in Haringey. This enables them to sustain relationships with their carers and benefit from continuous support.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: good

47. In 2018, inspectors judged Haringey children's services to require improvement to be good. Since then, an ambitious and stable leadership team has made considerable progress and much of the service is now transformed. The senior leadership team has achieved steady improvement in the quality and impact of social work practice for children in need of help and protection and sustained good support for care leavers. Services in these areas are now good, with some examples of excellent child and family-centred practice.

48. Progress for children in care has not been achieved at the same pace. While many children in care are supported well, others have experienced significant delay in achieving permanence, and some have had too many social workers. This lack of stability has affected some children's progress. The context in Haringey has been a particularly challenging one. Many children in care are older children who have complex needs, including some who have been affected by the extremes of deprivation, extra-familial harm, gangs and violent crime. While recruitment and retention are national issues, they have been compounded in Haringey by a legacy of reputation, and leaders have needed time to successfully reshape the workforce. Leaders are fully aware of what needs to improve for their children in care and they are focusing on accelerating improvement. Recently strengthened oversight and monitoring are starting to show some impact.
49. Mature relationships, underpinned by trust, mean that leaders and elected members hold each other to account. There is ongoing political and corporate support with financial investment for children's services. Good governance arrangements are in place, ensuring that the senior leadership team and elected members communicate regularly and effectively.
50. Leaders take their responsibility as corporate parents for looked after children seriously. Haringey had a new administration in 2022. A champion programme commits elected members to take collective responsibility for enhancing the life chances of children and care-experienced adults. The corporate parenting board meets regularly, and the appointment of a participation officer is supporting children to have their voices heard and ensuring their involvement in strategic development plans.
51. Performance management is well established and is a priority. Effective trackers and panels enable leaders to monitor plans for most children well. However, permanence planning is inconsistent and the progress made for some children is too slow.
52. Leaders know their communities well and have targeted development and partnership initiatives at identified areas of need. Proactive collaborative work to improve local placement sufficiency is in development. The strategic and corporate ambition and vision set out in plans support a clear understanding and shared approach to prioritising and meeting children's needs.
53. Leaders have worked with partners to agree and pursue shared priorities that are informed by the experiences of local children and their families. This has strengthened relationships and joint work with partners. There is evidence of constructive professional challenge, joint training, auditing and continued discussions to improve multi-agency working with colleagues in justice, health and education, and through the safeguarding partnership. For example, targeted work with the police has focused on the impact for young people who are stopped and searched.

54. Leaders are connected to frontline practice and have good knowledge of individual children. A tangible sense about wanting to do the right thing fosters an open learning culture, and leaders engage readily in internal and external reviews and challenge. Leaders know their services well and there is a strong ethos of continuous learning. They use a range of information, including performance data, feedback, the comprehensive quality assurance framework and audit activity to inform plans to improve services for vulnerable children. A strength is where children have told leaders something is important to them, and this is translated into tangible action: 'you said, we did'.
55. Since 2018, leaders have strengthened services in several key areas of practice. Work to safeguard older children from risk and exploitation is a particular strength. The multi-agency-attended exploitation panel is an effective forum, bringing together agencies that swiftly provide bespoke packages of wraparound support to safeguard young people from exploitation. The impact of this practice can be seen in outcomes for individual young people and in having helped reduce the number of young people entering the youth justice system.
56. Supervision across children's services is regular, but it is not consistently strong enough to progress all children's plans. In good supervision, social workers participate in reflective discussions alongside the reviewing of tasks and compliance activities.
57. Staff have access to a wide range of training opportunities through Haringey Children's Academy and other accredited training opportunities. Workers appreciate the training offer, although accessing training can be challenging at times due to caseload demands.
58. Successful workforce planning and staff development in Haringey have increased the number of frontline practitioners supporting children. This includes extensive and successful overseas recruitment. This has increased capacity to sustain a good-quality service and is a substantial improvement since the last inspection.
59. Haringey's diverse population is reflected in the workforce and senior leadership team. This is important to frontline staff and one of the attractions of working for this local authority. Staff and leaders are acutely aware of the enduring public perception of Haringey children's services. At all levels, staff are proud of working for Haringey. A culture of appreciation, kindness and support is firmly embedded. Staff said their leaders care about them, listen to them and take action to address the things that need to change. In turn, staff are loyal and they care about their leaders. Staff who leave often return to Haringey. They talk about the feeling of 'family'. This sense of emotional safety is vitally important, enabling workers to practise with the confidence and persistence needed to effect change for children and young people who are living in very challenging circumstances.

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