

# Inspection of Enfield local authority children's services

**Inspection dates:** 22 to 26 July 2024

**Lead inspector:** Christine Kennet, His Majesty's Inspector

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
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	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Children and families living in the London Borough of Enfield receive consistently good services. Since the last inspection in 2019, committed political and corporate leadership has enabled services for children and families to remain strong, and some services have improved. Most children receive good, consistent support and protection that is making a tangible difference to their lives. Early help services have been strengthened, with two family hubs opened in the borough. Investment in contextual safeguarding, core social work practice, particularly in the children in care teams, and social work support for care leavers post-18 stand out as areas of strong practice. Children in care in Enfield receive outstanding levels of support wherever they are placed, making significant progress. Leaders are aware there is more work to be done and have firm plans to address shortfalls, but the pace of change in the out-of-hours team has been too slow. Senior leaders are strengthening quality assurance processes and partnership work and have ambitious priorities for the future. Social workers enjoy working for Enfield and workforce stability is improving, with a strong training and well-being offer allowing good social work to flourish.

## What needs to improve?

- The pace of the restructure of the out-of-hours service, to improve the response to children.
- Advocacy support to children aged 16 and 17 at risk of homelessness and their understanding of their rights and entitlements.
- Care leavers' understanding of their rights and entitlements through the local offer.

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

1. Children and their families are helped by impressive early help arrangements which have good partnership buy-in and are having a positive impact for many families. Skilled and highly experienced workers address children and families' support needs and consider with managers any emerging concerns at the earliest stage, helping to ensure that these do not escalate to the point where children need statutory intervention.
2. Early help assessments are comprehensive; they consider relevant historical information, include partner agency views and address any presenting concerns. Children are seen quickly, and workers spend time with them individually to seek their wishes and feelings to help inform assessment outcomes. Parental views are included in assessments, and areas where support is needed are carefully explored. Multi-agency meetings ensure that other involved professionals contribute to the development of effective plans. Regular reviews help workers to manage risks and evaluate families' needs and ensure that children are receiving the right level of help.
3. If risks to children escalate or their needs increase, step-up transitions to statutory interventions are prompt and these transfers are carefully managed. Similarly, step-down transfers to lower levels of intervention are appropriately risk assessed. Workers navigate complexity with professional confidence, with clearly recorded guidance from managers. This is helping to ensure that children receive the right level of help to meet their needs.
4. Initial contacts are quickly processed by advanced practitioners or deputy team managers in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Specialist teams in domestic abuse and adolescent safeguarding provide consultation to MASH workers, enabling timely transfer to social work teams and appropriate help being identified. Other professionals value the consultation line which offers advice to partner agencies and members of the public who have concerns about children; calls are converted into immediate referrals when necessary.
5. The MASH is effective, and thresholds are well understood. Red, amber, green (RAG) ratings provide workers with a clear steer on priorities and managers give advice on what needs to be reviewed through multi-agency checks.

Parental consent is well understood, with determined attempts made to engage both parents, including non-resident parents. Consent is appropriately overridden when required, with management oversight recorded as to the rationale. MASH workers speak to children where their age and understanding allows this and workers persistently try to contact difficult to reach families and children. Social workers and managers in the MASH explain their decision-making quickly to other professionals, and in writing to children and families once decisions are made on next steps.

6. Experienced and skilled managers in the MASH have a strong oversight of the work coming into and flowing through the service. Following triage, management oversight is clear about necessary next steps and work is moved promptly through the system so that children continue to receive timely interventions which improve their well-being.
7. When risks increase for children, immediate transfers to the assessment and intervention teams (AIT) are triggered for child protection strategy meetings to be held. Most strategy meetings are timely, are attended by multi-agency partners and include sharing of all relevant information. Children's voices are consistently captured to help to understand their experiences and the potential impact of any harm. Actions taken are appropriate and define what needs to happen immediately, along with any subsequent actions to ensure children's safety. Safety planning is evident for children and where there are high levels of concern, children are visited immediately. Family and community networks are used creatively to support children while enquiries continue. Kinship care is used effectively where this is safe and appropriate for children.
8. Child protection investigations are thorough, and the outcomes are consistent with identified risks and needs, leading to children receiving the right level of help. The application of thresholds for any next steps is proportionate and appropriately applied. Children are routinely seen alone, and sensitive direct work captures their wishes and experiences and informs assessments.
9. Initial child protection conferences are timely and include relevant professionals who share detailed relevant information on children's circumstances. Initial child protection plans identify children's needs well, to ensure swift and timely actions that help to protect them. Child protection plans are comprehensive and include a range of support for both children and families. This, alongside close partner agency work, is helping to reduce risks to children, enabling families to get the right help to meet their level of need.
10. Social work assessments are timely, with succinct information and work progressed with tenacity by social workers when families are reluctant to engage. Assessments of children's needs are comprehensive and include parents' own histories and needs as well as the child's history and experiences. Children's views are captured well through play and good use of a variety of tools to inform planning, so that children's views influence their subsequent plans.

11. Child in need plans address the concerns raised from assessments and have improved in quality since the last inspection. The format for writing plans is currently under review, to make them easier to read and understand for children and families. Child in need meetings are well attended and recorded, with a close focus on how the plan is progressing and on any emerging concerns, with the right level of help targeted where needed to improve children's circumstances.
12. Disabled children who are subject to child in need and child protection planning are helped through timely and effective interventions that make a significant difference to their lives. Most plans contain actions which are specific and measurable, with regular and well-attended reviews.
13. Children and young people who go missing from home or are at risk of sexual and/or criminal exploitation are quickly transferred to the adolescent safeguarding teams, where they receive a prompt specialist service focused on prevention and disruption. A range of creative approaches are used with children, for example, social workers assess the needs of children using a specialist tool which gives a baseline assessment of where their boundaries are and what risks they are presenting with. These tools and assessments, as well as strategy meetings, are used effectively to understand the nature and level of extra-familial harm, leading to the prompt recognition of risks. There are strengthened processes in place to offer return home interviews more promptly for children who have been missing, and most interviews are timely, well recorded and ask appropriate questions. Findings are shared with agency partners and families, with consent.
14. Children who present as homeless are seen quickly, and immediate decisions are taken if they need accommodation. Although children have their circumstances assessed in a timely way, they are not routinely provided with advocacy to help them to understand all their rights and entitlements.
15. The risks that young carers experience in their daily lives are identified well. The response is appropriately moderated to the level of risk or need, and young carers benefit from a range of services, from early help to statutory social work interventions. The response is timely and, while there is some variability in its delivery, it is holistic in coverage. For example, some partner colleagues whose views are important are absent from meetings, but work is still focused on the issues that make children vulnerable, and workers advocate strongly for children.
16. Children who are privately fostered are visited regularly and they live in suitable and sustainable care arrangements. Social workers complete timely checks and assessments of suitability and have an understanding of their responsibilities to these children. Children's needs are well supported under child in need planning.

17. A small number of children do not receive a consistent response from the emergency duty service. Although some children receive an excellent service, some have had a slower response to providing access to services until the handover to daytime teams. Senior leaders are already aware of the inconsistencies and have an agreed and credible plan in place to improve performance in this service.
18. Arrangements to manage allegations against professionals are robust. Work is thorough and the local authority designated officer (LADO) provides guidance, consultation and training to any agencies involved with children.
19. Children missing education are supported via a number of initiatives which are working proactively and in partnership with schools to help with early identification of pupils who may be missing education. Established partnership arrangements with the virtual school are managing the needs of vulnerable children, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those pupils at risk of missing education, as well as supporting pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues. In addition, a senior advisory teacher is embedded in the adolescent safeguarding teams to prevent exclusions and address persistent absence of children on child in need plans.
20. The list of children who are electively home educated is growing, reflecting a national trend. The local authority has effective systems in place to satisfy itself that vulnerable home-educated children are safeguarded.

### **The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding**

21. Children who are in care in Enfield receive outstanding care and support from social workers and carers who know them very well. Consequently, most children, including those who are placed outside the borough, make significant and tangible progress. Enfield is highly committed to keeping children at home with their families or with their family and friends' networks when it is safe to do so. Consequently, children only come into care when it is necessary, and kinship care is well supported.
22. Permanence planning is effective and timely, securing stability for children. Clear oversight from managers, decision-making panels and independent reviewing officers (IROs) ensures that children benefit from timely arrangements to secure permanence at the earliest opportunity.
23. Experienced and highly skilled social workers understand children's needs, wishes and feelings very well. Manageable caseloads allow workers to visit children very frequently, in line with their needs. Workers undertake thoughtful, sensitive direct work and life-story work to help children to make sense of their life stories, to process any trauma they may have experienced and to understand more about their unique identities.

24. Children's assessments are updated for their looked after reviews, leading to effective planning. Assessments are of high quality and include relevant information from partner agencies. When risks are high, assessments and plans reflect this and are updated weekly, with frequent strategy meetings if children are missing or at risk of harm in the community. This positive level of highly effective support helps to reduce risk and is encouraging more positive engagement from children and young people.
25. Care plans are highly ambitious and regularly updated and they help professionals and carers to understand what they need to do to ensure that children receive the best possible care. Children's wishes and feelings are comprehensively used to create plans to reflect their views and ambitions. Social workers maintain or rebuild family links for children, and they explore kinship relationships to keep children within their own networks whenever possible. This means children often move to live with people who they know and trust and can build loving and enduring relationships.
26. Regular reviews have a clear focus on achieving the right form of permanence for each child according to their assessed needs. Most children's records evidence effective IRO oversight. IROs meet with children before their review meetings, encouraging them to attend, and when children do not attend their meetings, IROs consistently share children's views. IROs also hold progressive meetings with social workers between reviews to ensure that children's plans remain on track. Children are routinely very well encouraged to attend and contribute to their reviews. Their views are clearly heard and acted on.
27. Most children in care live in homes that provide them with stable and appropriate care, enabling them to develop and achieve. When it is not possible for children to return home, all options are considered to achieve permanence. There is a strong emphasis on trying to keep children in kinship placements through special guardianship orders.
28. Only one child was living in an unregistered children's home. Providers are actively encouraged to become registered. Children in such placements are seen very regularly and there is a robust process to monitor these arrangements, including effective oversight, monitoring and scrutiny by senior managers, while alternative provision is sourced.
29. Children in care are actively encouraged and enabled to spend time with family, friends and former carers where this is safe and appropriate. Social workers are confident to make changes to family time as children get older and their needs change.
30. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are very well supported. They live in suitable accommodation with carers who are able to respond well to their cultural and identity needs. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children access appropriate education provision and are quickly helped to access the courses. A specialist worker is focused on ensuring swift access to legal guidance and

responsive practical guidance. Health needs are assessed in depth and appropriate emotional and mental healthcare are provided where needed.

31. Disabled children in care are very well supported by social workers who have a detailed understanding of their health needs, methods of communication and how best to help them to voice their views about the care they receive. Social workers visit children regularly and carry out sensitive and thoughtful direct work with them to identify their wishes and ensure that they are able to influence their care plans. Disabled children's review meetings are well attended by the right professionals, to ensure a timely, well-considered multidisciplinary response to need and transitions. Mental capacity assessments, applications to court for court of protection and deprivation of liberty safeguards and planned packages of care are routinely in place before children reach 18, ensuring a smooth transition.
32. Children's health needs are met well. Health needs are very carefully considered to ensure that children get the care and help they need quickly. The service provided by the specialist children looked after nurse supports most children to receive timely assessments of their health needs and prompt access to dental services, ensuring their needs are met. Children in care have access to a child and adolescent mental health service that quickly responds to children's emotional health needs to ensure that these needs are met without delay.
33. Social workers address children's learning needs and ensure that they are supported not only in their school setting but also in hobbies and fun activities that enrich their lives. Children are strongly encouraged to participate in a variety of interests and hobbies, including going to after-school clubs and youth clubs and going on holidays abroad, among an array of other activities.
34. The virtual school provides a highly effective service for children in care. Leaders know individual pupils and schools very well. The quality of personal education plans ensures that education support meets the needs of most children. Many initiatives are in place for children, including tuition and timely therapeutic services, which have a measurable positive impact on children's progress and attainment, attendance and emotional health.
35. There is a successful strategy to recruit new foster carers, but the number of foster carers leaving the service means the authority is still in deficit. Placement sufficiency is an ongoing challenge. Foster carers receive consistent and positive support from their supervising social workers, but the quality of this is not always captured in records.
36. Partnership working with the regional adoption agency (Adopt London North) is effective in its arrangements to achieve adoption for children. For a very small number of children where there has been delay, this is attributable to delayed court proceedings or the complexity of children's needs.

## **The experiences and progress of care leavers: good**

37. Care leavers are offered good services and support which are helping them to make positive progress. Children experience smooth transitions to their leaving care workers, and many continue with their allocated social workers when they reach adulthood, retaining the benefit of this support for as long as they need it. This helps early pathway planning and recognises the strength of relationships continuing into adulthood. Allocated workers offer flexible support that is attuned to care leavers' individual needs; they know them well and visit them according to their unique needs.
38. Workers build strong relationships with care leavers and are alert to any changes in care leavers' presentation, meaning that they can take proactive action as soon as they see any indications of concern affecting care leavers' well-being. Workers are tenacious in ensuring care leavers' well-being and safety at times of crisis. Workers are familiar with potential risks for care leavers, including the risk of exploitation, and they adjust their risk assessments and plans accordingly, to reflect the level of need. Care leavers' workers work closely with relevant agency partners to reduce risks and implement plans to make care leavers safer, including presentation at the contextual safeguarding panel if needed.
39. Pathway plans are focused on necessary actions to help care leavers to achieve their goals. Most pathway plans are co-produced with care leavers; they are detailed, completed regularly and promptly updated when circumstances change. In a small number of plans, for harder to engage care leavers, the views and wishes of the care leaver are not apparent. Most pathway plans have a focus on supporting and encouraging care leavers into education, employment or training and workers continue to update plans for care leavers aged 21 and over.
40. Care leavers are supported to address their physical and emotional health needs, as well as being helped to access specialist healthcare, adult mental health services, emotional health support and substance misuse services when necessary.
41. Workers actively encourage care leavers to access education, employment or training. Care leavers benefit from the 'striving to achieve and aim higher panel', with an education access worker actively supporting them to access different streams of education, training or employment. As a result, a high proportion of care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training and the local authority strives to further improve this.
42. Most accommodation meets the needs of care leavers. Care leavers are well supported to develop their life skills to navigate the opportunities and challenges of adult life, so they can live independently. When workers feel that care leavers are ready, based on an assessment of their capacity to successfully manage their own tenancies, they are considered by the care



leavers' tenancy nomination panel. This ensures that care leavers are well supported in this transition and have stability in these arrangements.

43. The implementation of a care leaver participation worker and the formation of the care leaver forum is giving care leavers an increased role in shaping and developing services. Care leavers feel that they have a voice and that they are listened to, and this is seen through their input at the corporate parenting board. Being care experienced is now a protected characteristic in Enfield and care leavers spoke positively about being guaranteed an interview if they apply for a job with Enfield Council.
44. Care leavers appreciate the hub space, which allows them to book in to meet and engage in groups and support services and use the facilities if needed. Care leavers told inspectors they feel that the council's creativity in working with other organisations ensures that they have access to bespoke support around specific issues such as their identity and community needs.
45. The published care leaver offer does not give enough clarity for care leavers and is not consistently explicit about their rights and entitlements to services. It is not always evident how care leavers are informed of their entitlements, as discussions are not routinely captured in pathway plans or in case records.
46. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are care leavers are well supported to access appropriate accommodation, legal advice, employment, and religious, cultural and community activities.
47. Care leavers who are parents receive appropriate levels of support from their workers to access services. Allocated workers act as good parents, attending births and appointments and offering parenting advice if required.
48. Care leavers who are in custody receive a good service from their workers, who continue to advocate for them while they are in custody. There is frequent and detailed engagement with prisons, professionals and family members to secure better outcomes for care leavers and plan for their release. Visits and contact are maintained, and pathway planning continues for these care leavers.

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

49. A strong and stable leadership team has maintained consistently good practice for children and their families in Enfield. Practice has remained good and, in some areas, has improved, such as the delivery of return home interviews, private fostering arrangements, children in care services and the health offer for care leavers. Where there are areas that still need improvement, leaders are aware of these and told inspectors about their plans to tackle them. Plans for progress are credible, however, in some areas the pace of improvement could be quicker, for example, a strengthened response to children by the out-

of-hours service and the care leaver offer being more ambitious in its entitlements for care leavers.

50. Services for children and families benefit from strong cross-party political support, which has led to continued commitment to and investment in children's services. Leaders have been active in strengthening service provision, implementing the family hubs, developing the purpose-built building for children's social care at Thomas Hardy House and tackling sufficiency issues through developing greater support for foster carers. When children receive statutory services, they experience consistently good core social work practice from all the teams, which is making a difference for them and their families.
51. Regular governance and scrutiny are in place through a range of meetings between political, strategic and operational leaders, giving a direct line of sight into frontline practice. Leaders and councillors attend and/or chair a range of practice panels, which helps them to understand the priorities of children's social care and the views and voices of children and young people.
52. Operational partnership work in Enfield is strong, and leaders work effectively to increase collaboration and strategic planning with partners to ensure that children and families are provided with the help, protection and support that they need.
53. Leaders have been working on areas of transformation following various reviews of practice and these have all led to positive change, for example, the new arrangements for oversight of allegations made about staff working with children through the LADO. A more recent evaluation of MASH services has led to an internal themed review regarding child protection processes, showing that leaders are proactive in addressing areas where practice can be improved.
54. Leaders continue to strive to improve services through set priorities, reviewing services and implementing restructures where necessary. There is an ambitious agenda to improve services for children by integrating family hubs with children's centres, reviewing the response to extra-familial harm, implementing the social care reforms, reviewing the existing practice model, restructuring the out-of-hours response, completing the MASH restructure and increasing social work apprenticeships.
55. Leaders have recognised well the challenges in providing sufficient high-quality placements for children. They have revamped the offer and support to foster carers to increase the range of foster families for children in the borough. In addition, there are plans to open two new local children's homes, and leaders are working on 'invest to save' projects such as in-house residential family centres, child assessment centres, short-breaks provision and care leaver accommodation.
56. Children and young people benefit from active children in care and care leaver groups which meet regularly. These positive groups enable children and young

people to gain support from one another and share their views with their corporate parents. There are well developed strategies with evidence of successes in co-production, participation and inclusion, with meaningful engagement of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These groups are enhancing participation opportunities for children and young people, with many examples of how they have contributed, including helping to design some of the rooms in Thomas Hardy House. Leaders have also sought to understand parents' experiences of child protection and child in need processes through the 'Enfield Talks' group. This is supporting practice guidance which advocates relational, respectful and honest relationships.

57. Leaders have developed a range of audit practice within a quality assurance framework. The objectives of the framework are in place, setting out the practice promise to children and families. Audits mostly give leaders an accurate insight into the quality of social work practice, however, in a minority of audits the gradings were over-optimistic and it was difficult to see the impact of work on outcomes for children. This became clearer when talking to practitioners on site about their audit experience and learning.
58. Social workers speak positively about working in Enfield and about their loyalty and commitment to children. Recruitment and retention of social workers are continuing challenges, but leaders have managed to improve stability in the workforce. Workers receive good-quality and consistent supervision. Training, support, management oversight and supervision of practice are strengths across all teams. Caseloads are manageable, allowing social workers to carry out high-quality direct work with children and families. There is a staff pledge in the workforce development strategy which encourages staff retention, with a focus on staff well-being and support with incentives to stay, including development opportunities and paid sabbaticals.
59. Enfield has established a learning environment through its Centre of Excellence (CoE) which is providing positive learning and development opportunities for the whole social care workforce. Enfield supports a number of students, social workers in their assessed and supported year in employment and social work apprentices who start their careers here and often choose to stay.

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