

Royal Borough of Greenwich

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 Board¹

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Children's services in the Royal Borough of Greenwich are good		
1. Children who need help and protection		Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance		Good

¹ 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

Vulnerable children and their families benefit from good support from the Royal Borough of Greenwich children's services. Early help partnership work is well coordinated and, in particular, the support provided by schools and children's centres is good. Agencies work well together. They have a good understanding of the thresholds for assistance from children's services and make referrals appropriately and promptly. In the main, the response to referrals by children's services is good and the multi-agency safeguarding hub is effective, further demonstrating the quality of partnership working. Urgent child protection issues are responded to well. Most assessments are of high quality and timely, and identify when further assistance is required. Direct work is of a high standard, and is provided by social workers who know the children and young people well. Children and young people who talked to inspectors spoke highly of the frequency of visits and their positive relationships with social workers. Plans are well focused and reviewed regularly. Advocacy arrangements to support children and young people to express their views, including those who are looked after, are underdeveloped.

Children looked after are supported well. Education support through the virtual school is of a very high quality and ensures good performance by children and young people of all ages. Support for national testing, apprenticeships and university admission demonstrates well the ambition of the local authority for its most vulnerable children. Health support is good, although initial health assessments are not always timely. Foster placements are of good quality, and the children's home operated by the local authority was judged to be outstanding by Ofsted at its most recent inspection. Children placed out of borough achieve similarly high-quality outcomes to those who are resident in Greenwich. Social work support to children in placements is good, although a small number of young people have returned home without thorough plans. Children are seen alone and their views are sought by social workers. Independent reviewing officers carry out reviews in a timely manner, and see the children and young people outside of the reviews to seek their opinions. Contact arrangements with family members are well considered in those meetings. However, only a limited number of children and young people have access to independent visitors.

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) has recently been relaunched. However, the views of children with disabilities and those placed outside of the borough are not yet represented. Children looked after and care leavers who met with inspectors did not have an understanding of their rights, and the written guarantee of their entitlements (the 'pledge') has not been refreshed for some time.

Adoption services are good and improving. The quality of this work is high, with a particular focus on ensuring good outcomes for hard-to-place children. Permanence options, including returning home, adoption and special guardianship orders, are considered at an appropriately early stage. The judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service spoke to inspectors positively about the work of

Greenwich social workers. Child permanence reports and the recording of the matching process do not consistently provide children with a clear understanding of the reasons for key decisions about their lives. Arrangements for fostering-to-adopt are not well developed.

Services for care leavers are of high quality. Much of this work is provided through the multi-agency services situated in The Point. Personal advisers, and housing and health support, including for sexual health and mental health, are all provided in this excellent central resource. Education, employment and training opportunities have improved over the last year, although too many care leavers continue to be not in education, employment or training. At the time of the inspection, 15 care leavers were in custody. However, good work is taking place to prepare them for further education and work opportunities when they return to their communities.

Leadership, management and governance are mostly strong, providing an environment for good social work to thrive. The local authority has continued to make progress on the previous Ofsted inspections of child protection (in 2012), which judged services to be good, and of children looked after (in 2010), which judged services to be adequate. Good performance management, quality assurance and auditing ensure that senior managers are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of frontline practice. Performance in the longer-term childcare teams is of a good quality. However, in a small number of the more pressured assessment teams, there is too much variability in the timeliness and quality of social work support. In weaker cases, diversity and ethnicity are not sufficiently considered.

Change management and development work are of high quality, with workers across children's services contributing to improvements in services. A range of innovative projects is beginning to demonstrate positive impact on the outcomes achieved by children and their families. Due to an excellent focus on recruitment and retention, Greenwich has a workforce composed mainly of permanent staff. Social work supervision is generally of a good quality. However, the recording and planning from this is inconsistent. At the time of the inspection, management oversight was weak in relation to the response to allegations against professionals. Senior managers had not identified that the recently restructured local authority designated officer service was not robust. Once alerted by inspectors, senior managers responded well and reviewed all of the recent contacts with the designated officer, reopening some for further scrutiny and revising the structure and management oversight.

The multi-agency strategic and operational response to child sexual exploitation is good, with strong links to the local priority of tackling gangs and gang culture. Interviews with missing children on their return to home or care had not been carried out robustly and a new system has been in operation since May 2016. This has not yet been embedded, and information has not yet been analysed to identify patterns and trends. Work to address radicalisation is of a high standard, with excellent partnership work focused on safeguarding vulnerable children and young people.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates one children's home, which was judged to be outstanding at its most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children was in December 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in June 2010. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since April 2008. She is retiring in August 2016. The local authority completed the recruitment process for her successor during this inspection.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since October 2014.

Children living in this area³

- Approximately 64,676 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Greenwich. This is 24.1% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 29.2% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 20.3% (the national level is 15.6%)
 - in secondary schools is 18.4% (the national level is 13.9%).
- The proportion of children who meet the criteria for pupil premium funding:
 - in primary schools is 36% (the national level is 26%)
 - in secondary schools is 46% (the national level is 29%).

² 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.

³ Figures taken from 'Profile of children and young people in Greenwich, 2015'.

- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 49.6% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are from Black African and any other White backgrounds.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 42.4% (the national level is 19.4%)
 - in secondary schools is 33.9% (the national level is 15.0%).
- The 0 to 18 child population in Greenwich has grown by 9% over the past five years, with the fastest growing group being 0- to 10-year-olds. The Greater London Authority estimates a further rise of 13% (8,400 children) by 2021, with the fastest growth among 10- to 15-year-olds.

Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2016, 2,401 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a small decrease from 2,411 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 March 2016, 272 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan, the same number as at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 March 2016, 15 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement, one more than at 31 March 2015.
- Since the last inspection, five serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and two serious case reviews have been completed.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2016, 518 children were being looked after by the local authority, two fewer than at 31 March 2015 (the same rate of 80 per 10,000 children). Of the 518 children looked after in March 2016:
 - 376 (72%) lived outside the local authority area. 264 (51%) lived inside the local authority area or one of its neighbouring boroughs
 - 50 lived in residential children's homes, of whom 86% lived out of the authority area
 - no children lived in residential special schools
 - 412 lived with foster families, of whom 75% lived out of the authority area

- seven lived with parents, of whom five lived out of the authority area
- 21 children were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 20 adoptions
 - 30 children became the subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 234 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 5% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 30 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - 15 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation. None are in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that robust management oversight of the designated officer function is embedded, and that it enables allegations against professionals to be dealt with appropriately.
2. Continue to improve the consistency of management oversight and performance across all frontline social work teams.
3. Embed the management process for undertaking return home interviews of children who go missing, and analyse the information to identify patterns and trends in order to aid planning.
4. Improve the consistency of the recording of management decision making, supervision and report writing, including child permanence and matching reports, and ensure that the reasons for decisions are clear.
5. Ensure that issues of cultural background and diversity are consistently taken into account in assessments and subsequent planning.
6. Ensure that plans are in place for all children looked after who return home, to coordinate available support more effectively.
7. Improve the timeliness of initial health assessments for children looked after.
8. Make available sufficient advocacy services and independent visitors to meet the needs of children and young people.
9. Continue to develop the Children in Care Council, and ensure that children with disabilities and those placed out of borough are enabled to contribute.
10. Refresh the 'pledge' and ensure that all children and young people looked after and care leavers receive a copy, to support them to understand their rights and entitlements.
11. Explore the opportunities available from a fostering-to-adopt approach in order to improve further the availability of good-quality carers.
12. Increase the number of care leavers who are in education, employment and training.

Summary for children and young people

- Children's services in Greenwich provide children and their families with a lot of help when they are having problems or when parents are finding it difficult to look after their children properly. Help is provided quickly and at an early stage, which usually stops small problems becoming worse.
- When children and young people are in urgent need of protection, action is taken quickly to make them safe.
- Staff across services work together well to tackle gangs and their effect on young people, and they also work well to protect children and young people who are at risk of being sexually exploited.
- Children and young people get on well with their social workers. Social workers and other staff are good at listening to children and young people. They pay attention to the views of children looked after and make sure that they know what children would like to happen.
- When children or young people are brought into care because their parents are not able to look after them, the local authority makes sure that they live with foster carers who understand them or that they live in good-quality children's homes. Children and young people are looked after well and attend good schools, where they make good progress.
- When young people leave care, they are helped to find jobs, and many go to apprenticeships and university. Young people receive good help to learn how to live independently, and can access a wide range of good-quality services at The Point. However, social workers do not always have clear enough plans for working with older young people who do not want to be looked after to help them to keep out of trouble.
- The Children in Care Council is being developed to make sure that children and young people have more of an influence over the way in which they are looked after. Although staff and councillors care very much about children looked after, the 'pledge', which describes what children and young people are entitled to, is not clear enough.
- The local authority is good at making sure that children are adopted quickly by families when that is the best course of action, although it could sometimes do more to make sure that children understand why and how things are done.
- Leaders and managers are good at what they do. This helps social workers and other staff to do their jobs well and to work with other services, such as police and health, to make sure that children and young people have good experiences and outcomes. However, sometimes the quality of social work is too variable. For example, assessments do not always consider the family background and culture enough.
- At the time of the inspection, the services for investigating allegations against professionals were not effective. The local authority made improvements straight away.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children, young people and their families who need help and protection benefit from improved outcomes through effective multi-agency working. Services respond quickly, and children are safer as a result.</p> <p>Effective early help work in Greenwich provides families with good support, in particular from schools and children’s centres. Thresholds between early help and children’s social care are understood well. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides a good and thorough response to referrals from other agencies. In many cases, assessments provide a good analysis of need and lead to plans to meet that need. However, a small number of assessments are not completed in a timely manner or do not include sufficient consideration of cultural and ethnic background. Children are visited, and they and their families are engaged in high-quality direct work which reduces risk and promotes their welfare. Child protection plans identify what needs to change to keep children safe, with timely progress and better outcomes for children as a result.</p> <p>When children are at risk of sexual exploitation, or go missing or absent from home or school, there are highly effective arrangements to ensure a multi-agency response to support them and to take action to reduce their vulnerabilities. Young people are made aware of the dangers of inappropriate relationships and are helped to recognise unsafe situations. When domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse are putting children at risk, parents receive a good range of help, including services to help victims to understand the impact on themselves and their families.</p> <p>Arrangements for identifying and responding to children and young people who are privately fostered are well developed, and ensure that these children are kept safe and are appropriately cared for. Young people who present as homeless have their needs carefully considered and are very well supported to return home or to move to alternative provision. The dangers of radicalisation are understood well by the local authority and partner agencies. Effective processes identify young people at risk and help to build better relationships between communities. At the time of the inspection, the managerial oversight of the designated officer arrangements was not sufficiently thorough.</p> <p>Children and young people in Greenwich are listened to by their social workers and their views are actively sought. Staff know the children well and engage with them to explore their circumstances and to assess what needs to change for them in order for them to feel more secure. However, advocacy services are limited and are not always timely.</p>	

Inspection findings

13. Children and young people are well protected in Greenwich through good multi-agency partnership working.
14. Early help support is good. The early help framework is clear and is used effectively by agencies across Greenwich, in particular the 23 children's centres and all of the 83 schools. Services are well coordinated by a consultation service provided by experienced social workers, together with a team of early help staff. As a result, the volume of early help assessments has increased from 539 completed in 2014–15 to 765 in 2015–16. The framework is also underpinned by a range of tools and training to help agencies to identify needs and how these can best be met. Most early help assessments seen by inspectors were comprehensive and led to specific actions to support families and to prevent escalation to statutory services. The team around the child (TAC) approach is embedded well, with 854 children supported in this way over the last year. Children and young people also benefit from the provision of a broad range of universal, targeted and specialist services including family and parenting support through Families 1st, through early help services targeting older young people through The Point, and through support for first-time, vulnerable mothers through the family nurse partnership. Work with troubled families has successfully achieved a 100% turnaround of those families identified. There are a number of good initiatives that enhance intercommunity understanding and tolerance, including a local authority presence at the Islamic Centre to facilitate access to all local authority services.
15. Thresholds between early help and social care services are well understood, and partner agencies seek advice and escalate concerns in a timely manner. The MASH is appropriately resourced with staff from children's social care services, the police, health and education. Decision making is informed by thorough information gathering and good consideration of previous involvement with agencies. Consent is sought appropriately from parents and carers to share information and, when necessary, repeated efforts are made to secure it.
16. Management oversight is evident, with decisions recorded in all cases. Decisions to step down or progress cases to further assessment are made quickly, ensuring that families receive timely responses to their needs and offers of support, when necessary. Strategy meetings are thorough and most involve a good range of agencies. Interventions are proportionate to risk and, when children and young people need to be safeguarded, actions are taken promptly to ensure that they are kept safe. There are effective arrangements in place to provide a response out of hours. Access to information on current cases and history of past involvement is readily available, helping to ensure that decisions are timely and appropriate.

17. The majority of assessments of need seen by inspectors are good. They are informed by previous history and take account of significant difficulties affecting family members, such as domestic violence, and alcohol and drug misuse. In most assessments seen by inspectors, there was evidence of a good understanding of the impact of neglect. Assessments also provide a clear analysis of risk and relevant recommendations for future action. However, in some of the assessment teams, not all of the assessments are completed within the identified timescales. A very small number seen by inspectors were completed significantly beyond this period, although this did not leave any children at risk. In these teams, inspectors also saw variability in the quality of assessments, including limited analysis, in particular of diversity and identity issues. (Recommendation)
18. When no further social care involvement is required, there is a well embedded step-down process to early help, with a TAC and an identified lead professional continuing to support the family. This ensures that there is no gap in services between social care closure and other services that provide support. The transfer of cases between teams is effective and does not lead to delay in allocation of work.
19. Child protection enquiries are held promptly, and children and young people are not subjected to these investigations unnecessarily. Investigations are undertaken by qualified staff, who ensure that children are seen and spoken to alone. Child protection assessments identify risk effectively. Plans have clear, timely actions to minimise those risks, together with appropriate support to allow families to make changes. Conferences are timely. There are management reviews of cases when child protection plans have been in place for more than a year, and close monitoring of progress has resulted in low numbers of children remaining on plans for more than two years. In addition, there is excellent use of impact review meetings to consider whether multi-agency plans and actions are reducing the risks sufficiently or whether other options need to be considered. The local authority demonstrates a willingness to take further robust action to safeguard children if required, including through the use of care proceedings.
20. Core groups are held regularly, with good levels of multi-agency involvement. They are used effectively to review and update the child protection plan. Recordings of core group meetings demonstrate progress and reduction in levels of risk. Visits to young people on child protection plans are regular, with all young people seen within timescales agreed at conferences and core groups.

21. Managerial oversight was evident in almost all cases seen by inspectors. Mostly, inspectors saw good oversight with well-recorded decision making, reflection and clear guidance to staff. However, the designated officer service has received insufficient management attention. The service was restructured in April 2016. Inspectors found that these new arrangements are not robust. The local authority took swift action during this inspection to review all referrals to the service since 1 April 2016, ensuring that children and young people were safe. Immediate changes were made to the management arrangements. (Recommendation)
22. Children and young people in Greenwich are listened to by their social workers and their views are actively sought. Social workers know their cases well. In the vast majority of cases, inspectors saw direct work with children, young people and their families that focuses on what needs to change to improve their safety and welfare. Recording of work undertaken is often of high quality and includes analysis of visits made. Children and young people are seen and seen alone, when appropriate, and their wishes and feelings are recorded in detail and included in the plans for children. However, availability of advocacy support at child protection meetings is limited and not always timely. (Recommendation)
23. There are good arrangements to support children in need who require assistance from children's services. These include multi-agency child-in-need plans, which are regularly reviewed and updated through well attended meetings. Work with children in need is detailed and benefits from a clear understanding by social work staff of what needs to change in order to effect progress.
24. The local authority's response to those children and young people who go missing from home is improving. Children and young people are offered a return interview through a commissioned service, with police carrying out a separate safe-and-well visit. In the last quarter of 2015–16, 40% of all those missing from home were not offered an interview within 72 hours. A new service has been commissioned and, although 93% of young people reported missing have not gone missing for a second time, it remains too early to establish impact. (Recommendation)

25. Arrangements for identifying those young people who may be at risk of sexual exploitation are well developed. Partner agencies work together effectively to assess the levels of risk to which young people are exposed. Associated risks, such as connections with gangs, are closely monitored, and the local authority and partners are well informed about hotspots and areas of concern, such as peer-on-peer abuse. The local authority captures information on those young people who may be considered vulnerable by using a comprehensive data tool. This allows the local authority to identify and target young people who may be at risk of a range of issues, including going missing from home, sexual exploitation, poor school attendance rates, gang association, early help status, not in education, employment or training (NEET) status, or having a statement of educational needs. This is a potentially powerful tool which has already enabled the local authority to identify emerging concerns such as gang-based activity at secondary schools.
26. The local authority also uses a child sexual exploitation assessment tool to assess overall risk and vulnerability. It is used by social workers on a regular basis to measure progress and reduction of risk, and has been adapted for multi-agency use. Social workers have a good understanding of risks associated with child sexual exploitation. Plans and actions seen by inspectors to help and support young people at risk of child sexual exploitation were clearly focused. Progress was seen in most cases, and risk reduction had been demonstrated over time.
27. Attendance of children in need at school is higher than the national average, and the proportion of those children who are persistently absent is lower. There have been no recent permanent exclusions of children in need, but the proportion with at least one fixed-term exclusion, although reducing, is higher than the level for England. For children in need who are also subject to a child protection plan, overall absence is the same as the national average.
28. At the time of the inspection, 216 children and young people were electively home educated (EHE). Schools contact the EHE officer promptly when parents decide to educate their children at home. Procedures for assessing the suitability of EHE are robust. Pupils are checked against the social care database and a list of all children with identified vulnerabilities. In addition, for all cases open to social care, risk factors are reviewed by a social work manager and the EHE officer. The EHE officer carefully assesses the appropriateness of the education provided. There is a willingness to act when the education provided is unsuitable. Seven school attendance orders were issued last year, with one resulting in court proceedings.

29. Clear procedures are in place for schools to alert the local authority when pupils are removed from school and their destinations are unknown. Schools immediately refer the case to the MASH if there are any known concerns about the pupil. Information from a wide range of sources, such as the National Health Service, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and the Home Office, are checked in order to track parents. During the period January to December 2015, 233 children and young people were referred to the 'children missing education' officer. Following appropriate and exhaustive investigations, the education placements of 34 children could not be traced and these were placed on the national missing children's list.
30. All pupils attending pupil referral units have 25 hours of education a week, with the exception of a small number attending for assessment or who attend specialist provision for medical reasons. Four other providers of alternative provision are used by the authority, mostly for pupils with emotional needs. They are registered as alternative provision schools, quality assured by the authority, and visited regularly by a school leader and the alternative education officer.
31. A good range of support is offered to adults and young people experiencing the effects and impact of substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. There is also a good range of services relating to raising awareness about safeguarding, particularly among young people at school. Inspectors saw that, when part of the child protection plan, social workers are equipped and trained in the use of drug and alcohol testing kits to ensure that concerns are identified, explored and responded to quickly.
32. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are well established, and focus on those most at risk and those who pose risk. Some responses to tackling domestic violence are innovative, including joint funding by the local authority and the police, with a team of officers forming the domestic violence intervention team to target the top 15 perpetrators in the borough, and to work with victims and perpetrators separately on a longer-term basis. This includes a programme called 'Yuva' for young people who are perpetrators of violence.
33. Arrangements for identifying and responding to children and young people who are privately fostered are good. At the time of the inspection, 16 children and young people were supported through these arrangements. All of the children have received timely assessments, and are visited and reviewed regularly. There are also awareness days and public events in libraries and leisure centres to improve public knowledge and understanding of private fostering.

34. Young people who present as homeless are supported well. Assessments are conducted through The Point, which provides an excellent range of multi-agency services to support young people in crisis. Following assessments, a good range of support services is provided, which may include provision of accommodation or the opportunity to become looked after. As a result, no young person has been accommodated in unsuitable accommodation, including bed and breakfast provision, in the last 12 months, and this is good practice.
35. The Royal Borough of Greenwich has been a 'Prevent' priority area since 2012. Children who are highly vulnerable to radicalisation benefit from sensitive and complex multi-agency support, which is effective in safeguarding the child while at the same time protecting the public. A small number of cases are currently being managed through the multi-agency 'Channel' panel. Workshops to raise awareness of radicalisation have also been held across the early help workforce and schools.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children and young people looked after in the Royal Borough of Greenwich receive a good service. Decisions about whether children need to become looked after are appropriate and timely. Good assessments inform plans, which are reviewed regularly. Social workers know children well and visit them often, ensuring that their views are captured. The large majority of children looked after, including those placed out of borough, have much-improved outcomes as a result of the support that they receive. Children looked after are very well supported in all areas of their education by the excellent virtual school. Children’s and young people’s educational progress is good at all key stages. In the majority of cases, children’s and young people’s health needs are identified and met, although the timeliness of initial health assessments needs improving.</p> <p>The vast majority of children are in settled, good-quality placements. Social work support to placements is good, although a small number of young people have returned home without thorough plans. Support to young people at risk of child sexual exploitation is good, with recent improvements in response to children who go missing. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is growing in numbers, but the views of children placed outside the borough and children with disabilities are not currently represented. Advocacy and independent visitor services are limited. Not all children and young people looked after and care leavers are informed about the local authority’s commitment to them. The ‘pledge’ is out of date, although plans are in place to update it.</p> <p>The quality of permanence work is good. The local authority is committed to pursuing adoption for all children, whenever possible, and progress is tracked effectively. Timeliness of adoption is close to the national level and improving. Fostering-to-adopt approaches are underdeveloped. The quality of planning and assessments is generally good, although the quality of child permanence and matching reports is too variable. Adoption support to children and adults is often excellent and is valued highly by those who receive it. Disruption rates are low.</p> <p>Care leavers are well supported by social workers and personal advisers, who have good relationships with them. The local authority is in contact with the vast majority of care leavers, most of whom have up-to-date pathway plans. Young people are supported well by the virtual school, resulting in a high number at university and in apprenticeships. They receive prompt and effective advice and guidance on education, training and employment opportunities through the excellent multi-agency services located at The Point. Although improving, further work is needed to increase the numbers of care leavers in employment, education or training. Too many young people are in custody, although the support that they receive on discharge is good.</p>	

Inspection findings

36. Children and young people looked after in the Royal Borough of Greenwich receive a good service. Decisions to look after children are appropriate and are timely in almost all cases. Placements are of good quality. The large majority of children enjoy improved outcomes as a result of being looked after.
37. Assessments evaluate risks, and parallel planning is in place to ensure that children are only looked after if there are no suitable alternatives. Family group conferences are timely. They are used to inform care planning and to identify extended family members who are willing to care for the child. Viability assessments to evaluate the ability of extended family members to care for children and young people are of good quality, with appropriate management oversight in place.
38. Effective legal planning meetings and close monitoring and tracking of cases under the Public Law Outline mean that children move swiftly through the legal system. This has resulted in average timeliness of proceedings improving to 30 weeks in the third quarter of 2015–16, from 32 weeks in 2014–15.
39. The quality of work placed before the court is good, and less experienced social workers are well supported by managers. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the local judiciary report good working relationships with the authority. In particular, work that is undertaken as part of the South London care proceedings pilot has a positive impact on resolving issues proactively and on improving the timeliness of court proceedings.
40. The local authority has recently reviewed all children looked after in voluntary agreements under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This has resulted in a small number of proceedings being issued. Inspectors saw cases that pose significant challenges to the local authority when young people over the age of 16 had effectively discharged themselves from care and, while tenacious efforts were being made to engage the young people, not all were successful. Plans are not always in place for those young people who discharge themselves from care, which could potentially result in families not being provided with the support that they need. Plans are in place for younger children, and include appropriate arrangements for support and monitoring. (Recommendation)
41. Contact arrangements for children and young people are appropriately assessed. They are well supported to maintain contact with their families and friends. Inspectors saw good examples of reports from supervised contact informing plans for children. Contact issues were considered in all matches for permanence seen by inspectors.

42. Social workers know their children and young people well. Children's views influence their assessments, plans and reviews. Inspectors saw examples of sensitive direct work with children to support their understanding of their earlier experiences. The majority of statutory visits are undertaken within timescales. In all cases, when appropriate, children are seen alone. While there is a fixed age range in the permanency teams which requires children to change social workers at 13, this transition is well managed and planned for. In the majority of cases from the longer-term childcare teams that were seen by inspectors, children's identity and diversity needs were considered well, including sensitive attention being paid to meeting needs arising from their sexuality.
43. The local authority and partner agencies show great commitment to ensuring that children placed outside the borough are not disadvantaged. In the vast majority of cases, children and young people looked after outside of the borough receive regular visits from their social workers, reviews are timely, designated health nurses travel to undertake health assessments, and young people are supported to maintain contact with their families and friends.
44. Children and young people looked after have access to advocacy and independent visitors through a commissioned service although, at the time of the inspection, only 11% of children looked after had access to an advocate. Twelve young people are currently matched to an independent visitor. However, a waiting list is in operation. (Recommendation)
45. There has been a net increase in the pool of available in-house foster placements in the last 12 months, despite the significant challenges faced by London local authorities in recruiting and retaining foster carers. Foster care recruitment activity is targeted effectively, based on a good understanding of the current and projected needs of the children looked after population. There is a continuing reliance on independent fostering agency (IFA) carers, but this does not adversely affect the level of support or commitment to such placements. One IFA carer with longstanding experience of caring for children from a range of local authorities said, 'I love working with Greenwich.'
46. Local foster carers are valued and feel valued by the local authority as key members of the professional team that is working with and caring for children. Carers have good access to an excellent training programme that is wide-ranging, relevant and responsive to individual needs. Similarly, a wide range of support groups, strongly promoted by the fostering service and well attended, is a significant part of the good support network for carers. The groups take very good account of foster carers' individual and collective support needs. Foster carers are well supported by their supervising social workers. Supervisory visits, including unannounced visits, are generally purposeful and well recorded.

47. The Mockingbird innovation programme is having a positive impact on children whose foster carers are supported by a hub of experienced foster carers. Children who are looked after widen their social networks and increase the number of adults with whom they can have trusting relationships. Foster carers receive support, which helps them to meet the needs of the children whom they care for. One foster carer spoke to inspectors about how respite care is offered by carers already known to her and the young person. She described it as 'like a family'.
48. The quality of placements is good. Cases seen by inspectors of children and young people being placed in specialist placements were appropriate, in response to identified need, and meeting children's educational and health needs. The local authority's placement and commissioning sufficiency strategy is rigorously monitored. It is meeting targets and demonstrates a good understanding of placement needs for children looked after, both current and future.
49. In the vast majority of cases seen, children are settled where they live and there is evidence of a sustained improvement in placement stability. The most recently published data compares favourably with that of similar authorities and national performance, and only 9% of children looked after moved more than once during 2015–16. This is good.
50. Recording of the decision making about the matches of children to suitable foster placements is not always sufficiently clear. For younger children in long-term foster care, practice is generally good and includes careful consideration of proposals at the local authority's fostering panel. For older children, when agreement to a long-term match is made by the permanence service manager following discussion at a child's statutory review, case records do not always demonstrate a clear rationale for proposing or agreeing matches. Similarly, when children first enter care, discussions during the matching process are not always clearly recorded, including the reasons for agreeing a match. Despite the increasing stability of placements and the high quality of support provided to carers, this deficit might have an impact on the later life experience of young people, who will have the opportunity to review their case files to seek the reasons why key decisions were made.
(Recommendation)
51. There is a suitably strong, service-wide focus on achieving permanence for all children looked after, through options that suit the needs of individual children. Permanence is considered at an early stage, either routinely at second statutory reviews or earlier via early permanence meetings, and was being pursued vigorously in the vast majority of cases that were seen by inspectors.
52. The increased use of special guardianship orders (SGOs) as a path to permanence for children is appropriate. SGO assessments are thorough and consider well the relationship between the prospective special guardian and the child. Support plans involving key agencies are relevant and realistic, and include appropriate financial packages to help to sustain placements.

53. Inspectors saw evidence of very good direct work undertaken to help young people to understand their life histories and to develop their sense of identity and belonging. This included examples of good life-story work.
54. Independent reviewing officers are consistent for children and young people looked after. Reviews are timely, in the vast majority of cases. Reviews drive plans forward effectively, with clear decisions and recommendations. Children's views are represented in the vast majority of cases, and independent reviewing officers meet them before the review. In 2015–16, 84% of children and young people attended at least one of their reviews. There is a clear emphasis on holding reviews at a time and place that are appropriate for the young person. There is also good attendance by relevant professionals.
55. The overall performance data on the health of children looked after is very good, with numbers of completed health assessments at 98.4% in 2015–16. Although the timeliness of initial health assessments for children and young people looked after is improving, only 50% are recorded as having been completed within 28 days. A proactive approach is taken to identifying health needs. For example, a speech and language therapist attends reviews in schools to raise awareness of the potential communication difficulties of children looked after. (Recommendation)
56. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) operate a prioritisation system for children looked after. CAMHS also provide training in schools and to foster carers. Feedback is extremely positive about how this has helped carers to support children and young people with the issues that they are facing. Inspectors saw examples of interventions helping children and young people to cope with the traumatic issues that they have experienced. New arrangements for regular case consultation by CAMHS for social workers have been put in place and their impact will be reviewed after six months.
57. The virtual school provides an excellent service to promote the education of children looked after. The head of the virtual school provides a high level of challenge and support to education and training providers. Key stage officers monitor the attendance, progress and attainment of children and young people very well, prioritising interventions for those not making expected progress appropriately. The virtual school has access for two days a week to two educational psychologists who observe and assess pupils placed out of borough, advise and support staff and provide multi-agency training. The virtual school reviews the education and training placements of all children and young people, advises social workers appropriately and ensures admission to schools that best meet the needs of individual pupils. Overall, 86% of children and young people, and 90% of those placed outside the borough, are in good or better schools. Provision for children and young people attending schools that are not yet good or outstanding is reviewed carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of individual pupils. Additional support is provided as required and moves are minimised.

58. The large majority of personal education plans (PEPs) are completed to a high standard. They are prepared by education settings, including early years and post-16 providers, which ensures that they are focused on children's and young people's progress and that the use of pupil premium funding is effective. The PEPs are ambitious, clarify attainment levels and required improvements, and set and review targets appropriately. PEP audits carried out by the virtual school indicate that targets are increasingly aspirational. Almost all reviews are timely.
59. Pupil premium funding is targeted well to the greatest needs, and the focused work of the virtual school is having a noticeable impact on raising attainment and improving attendance and behaviour. One-to-one tuition is used well. The virtual school is ambitious in its expectations for children and young people to take up a musical instrument, and a homework club provides valuable one-to-one support for up to 30 children and young people.
60. The attendance of children and young people looked after has improved over the last five years and is good, at 94% overall and 97% for primary-aged children. Attendance is tracked carefully by the virtual school, enabling prompt intervention. There is no significant difference in attendance between children placed within or outside the borough, and overall levels of persistent absence are below the levels for similar authorities and for England overall. There have been no recent permanent exclusions of children and young people looked after, and a smaller proportion of them than the national level are excluded for a fixed term. Due to the effective use of restorative approaches and prompt actions following exclusions, the overall number of exclusion days has reduced by 30% over the last three years. A specific bullying policy has been developed to support designated teachers, and the virtual school maintains a register of incidents in order to facilitate intervention.
61. The large majority of children and young people looked after make expected educational progress. Attainment in 2015, at all key stages, was above the 2014 national levels for children and young people looked after. Early years outcomes are good, with 73% achieving a good level of development, just below the national level of 77% for all children. At key stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or higher in reading, writing and mathematics in 2015 was well above the national level, with significant improvement from the previous year in writing and mathematics. Likewise, at key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics was higher than the England proportion level. Outcomes at key stage 4 were particularly good in 2015, with 27% achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
62. Effective action is taken when child sexual exploitation concerns are identified. This includes a risk assessment which is regularly monitored and an appropriate plan to reduce risk. Inspectors saw direct work being undertaken to support young people to minimise risk-taking behaviour.

63. Senior managers had recognised that they were not effectively offering return home interviews to all children and young people missing from care, and a new system has been in operation since May 2016. It is too early to identify its impact. Inspectors sampled a small number of return home interviews conducted since this date and found them to be of good quality, with risks explored and actions taken as appropriate. (Recommendation)
64. Children and young people have access to a wide range of social and educational opportunities. There is good attention to considering and agreeing the delegated authority for day-to-day decisions about children's lives and, whenever possible, these decisions are made by foster carers. Inspectors saw examples of social workers using leisure activities to engage young people creatively in order to build trusting relationships. Local authority funding to encourage extra-curricular activities and children's and young people's personal interests and development is used increasingly well. A panel administers health bursaries aimed at improving emotional well-being. For example, this has been used to fund gym membership. In 2015–16, 153 children and young people received bursaries of between £50 and £150 each.
65. The numbers of children and young people involved in the CiCC are small, but growing. There are plans in place to develop this service further, and the introduction in November 2015 of a group for younger children already has 12 members. There is currently insufficient involvement by children placed outside the borough and children with disabilities. Young people told inspectors that they feel that they are 'really listened to' by senior managers and the lead member. (Recommendation)
66. The 'pledge' has not been refreshed for 18 months, and young people from the CiCC told inspectors that they had not heard of it. This demonstrates that some children and young people looked after are not sufficiently informed about their entitlements. (Recommendation)

<p>The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good</p>

67. Adoption is considered appropriately and promptly for children looked after, including for those who are typically less easy to place for adoption, such as groups of brothers and sisters and children from Black and ethnic minority families. Greenwich has a strong track record of pursuing and achieving adoption for children aged five years and over.
68. The number of children adopted from care remains relatively low, although it increased to 22 in 2015–16 after a significant drop in the previous year. The reduction in the numbers of adopted children coincided with an increase in the percentage of children looked after leaving care under a special guardianship order. Inspectors saw plans and assessments appropriately focused on the needs of individual children and prospective adopters, and there was no evidence of missed opportunities to pursue adoption for children.

69. Overall, the timeliness of adoption is improving. The adoption scorecard data for 2012–15 shows that performance is close to the national average, and the local authority reports a continued overall improvement in 2015–16. This improvement is underpinned by effective oversight of children’s plans, including regular early warning meetings that focus professionals’ attention on effective parallel planning when it has been identified that adoption may be possible for children who have entered care. The recently established family-finding role, based within the adoption team, and an adoption worker linked to each of the children’s social care teams promote good early permanence planning across the service.
70. Family-finding activity is initiated as early as possible and is widened, when necessary, by the routine use of national and regional search mechanisms and interagency placements. As a result, children and young people who are matched with carers from other adoption agencies do not experience delay in achieving permanence.
71. Adopter recruitment activity, often undertaken in partnership with the well-established regional consortium, is based on a sound analysis of the needs of local children, and reflects the local authority’s commitment to adoption for children with diverse needs and backgrounds. Recruitment policy, materials and practice mirror the firmly held views of the adopters who spoke to inspectors, that Greenwich is positive and highly inclusive in its approach to applicants, such as same-sex couples and those from minority ethnic groups. A recently approved adopter said that he and his partner had been ‘blown away’ by Greenwich’s upbeat, welcoming and authoritative response to their interest in adoption.
72. Although some foster carers have gone on to adopt children whom they have looked after, Greenwich has no fostering-for-adoption placements yet, and its strategy is focused on a consortium approach to securing such placements. (Recommendation)
73. Assessments of adopters are of consistently good quality. They are thorough and suitably probing. The adoption team’s work with potential adopters is skilful, sensitive and assertive, leading to increased insight on the part of adopters into the nature of the task. There are occasional delays in assessments, but these are generally purposeful and lead to better outcomes for children. Meeting the required new national timescales for the completion of assessments remains challenging but, overall, the average time for completing assessments is improving. The local authority was able to complete a significant majority of two-stage assessments within the required timescales in 2014–15. Adopters spoken to by inspectors said that they feel that the pace of assessments is proportionate, and sensitive to their needs and wishes.

74. For adoptive placements, the consideration of potential matches is careful and systematic, leading to clear, well-evidenced reasons for decisions and to appropriate support for children and carers. The overall quality of assessments is high, particularly adoption placement reports and prospective adopter reports. Inspectors saw some examples of good-quality child permanence reports (CPRs), but the quality of these was too variable. The local authority is aware of the importance of consistently good-quality CPRs and has put in place sensible actions for improvement, including enhanced guidance and support for children's social workers, but it is too early to evidence the impact. (Recommendation)
75. The adoption panel meets regularly and fulfils its role well. It is suitably interrogative of plans and assessments presented to panel. Potential adopters are enabled to participate effectively at panel meetings. The panel performs its wider quality assurance function effectively. Timeliness of plans and assessments is monitored by the panel. Its experienced and effective chair provides regular feedback on panel activity and adoption performance to the agency decision maker (ADM). Recently, the panel raised concerns with the ADM over weaknesses in reports presented to the panel, and this has led to specific actions to improve the consistency of the quality of reports.
76. Post-adoption support is accessible, responsive and valued highly by those who receive it. Therapeutic support is prioritised and put in place, as necessary. Inspectors saw examples of very sensitive and thorough post-adoption support, including high-quality family support, intermediary work and help in accessing birth records, that potentially will have a lasting positive impact on the lives of adopted adults and children.
77. This individual support is complemented by a varied range of support groups and events, such as a group for adopted teenagers, annual fun days and the recently established birth mothers' group, which are valued by those who attend. Feedback from service users about the support and training that they receive helps to shape future planning and support. The virtual school offers good support to children placed for adoption, and the regular and creative use of the adoption support fund has benefited children and adopters. Disruption figures relating to children who have been placed for adoption are consistently low.

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

78. The support for care leavers is good. The Royal Borough of Greenwich has 258 care leavers, and was in contact with all but 11 at the time of the inspection. The proportion of 16-year-olds who remain looked after until they reach the age of 18 has improved over the last two years and was 73% in 2015–16. All of the young people who met inspectors reported that they have good relationships with their social workers and personal advisers. There is very good coordinated work to support the young people, including in relation to education, employment, housing and health. Despite this support, too many care leavers are in custody, too many are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and guidance on rights and entitlements is limited.
79. Almost all care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans which provide a clear overview of young people’s histories and aspirations. Plans focus well on young people’s successes, and clarify priorities and actions. When young people are vulnerable or challenging, pathway planning is supported through regular meetings of a team around the young person. These meetings are used effectively to facilitate multi-agency responses and to set targets for achieving the actions set out in pathway plans. The effectiveness of pathway planning is reviewed by independent reviewing officers for those under the age of 18, and by team leaders for 19- to 21-year-olds. Personal advisers who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the support that this provided, particularly when working with challenging young people with multiple vulnerabilities.
80. At the time of the inspection, the virtual school was in its second year of supporting the progress and attainment of 16- to 25-year-olds and is having a significant impact on standards. The virtual school tracks the progress of young people and works well with social workers, personal advisers and providers of post-16 education and training. Young people receive prompt and effective advice and guidance on education, training and employment opportunities through the highly accessible multi-agency services located at The Point.
81. All young people looked after progressed to positive destinations at the end of Year 11, with 94% achieving some form of qualification in 2014–15. Likewise, 78% of young people in Year 12 achieved some form of qualification by the end of 2014–15. Increasing levels of support provided by the virtual school, and a clear focus on improving education and training outcomes through PEPs and the work of personal advisers, are having a positive effect on maintaining the engagement of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in education, employment or training. The proportion of young people in education, employment or training improved substantially from 47% at the end of March 2014–15 to 57% at the same point in 2015–16, with further progress to be achieved.
(Recommendation)

82. There is a very good provision of apprenticeships by the local authority. Twelve young people were engaged in apprenticeships at the time of the inspection, with a further five in traineeships and preparing to progress to apprenticeships. A former care leaver who had completed an apprenticeship spoke very positively to inspectors about the experience that she and her colleagues had had while working in the local authority's children's services. They were made welcome and were treated as colleagues, which helped to improve their confidence and self-esteem.
83. The local authority is very good at encouraging and supporting young people to progress to higher education. Thirty-two care leavers were at university at the time of the inspection, and a further nine had firm offers for September 2016. Young people who met with inspectors were very positive about the way in which they had been encouraged to broaden their horizons, had high aspirations and were working hard to achieve their goals.
84. At the time of the inspection, too many (15) care leavers were in custody. However, they are visited regularly by their personal advisers, who work well with youth offending services and the virtual school to help young people to develop a positive attitude. All have pathway plans that are appropriately focused on preparing young people for release, on ensuring that they have suitable accommodation, and that they engage with education or training and progress to employment. One care leaver who was recently released from youth custody was settled in his own tenancy and at university. Personal advisers do not give up on more challenging young people, and work hard to engage them in activities that will divert them from gang- and drug-related activities on release. (Recommendation)
85. Young people are supported well by the designated looked after health service until they leave care. On leaving care, they are provided with a personalised letter that summarises their health history and includes useful contact details for different services. Health-related advice and support, including drug and alcohol and emotional health support, are easily accessible to care leavers through the comprehensive multi-agency services located at The Point. Young people who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the health-related services provided through The Point. CAMHS support young people until the age of 18 within the borough and to a radius of 60 miles. CAMHS also support transitions to adult services for up to six months, to ensure continuity. For young people living further from Greenwich, most of whom are in therapeutic placements, CAMHS work with local trusts to ensure that the support that young people receive adheres to National Health Service guidelines. Social workers and personal advisers are informed promptly when young people miss appointments, in order to facilitate intervention.
86. Pregnant young women and young mothers receive good support. Their parenting skills are assessed carefully, when necessary, and they are supported well by the family nurse partnership. Personal advisers ensure that they access the benefits to which they are entitled. They are helped to access appropriate tenancies or supported accommodation, and floating support services are provided as required.

87. Care leavers who misuse substances are strongly encouraged by their personal advisers to engage with drug and alcohol intervention services and services that address the frequently associated mental health concerns, although young people are often reluctant to recognise the health implications and dangers of their habit. Care leavers at risk of sexual exploitation are appropriately safeguarded with good multi-agency support provided through The Point.
88. Pathway plans focus on preparing young people for independence, and the accommodation needs of care leavers are carefully reviewed by the 'leaving care' workers and housing services at The Point to ensure that young people are placed in suitable accommodation. Commissioned housing meets the support needs of different groups of young people well. No care leavers were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or overnight emergency accommodation provided by private landlords during the 12 months prior to the inspection. At 31 March 2016, the proportion of former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation was 85%. Those who were not in suitable accommodation were in custody or were out of contact with the service.
89. Young people are encouraged to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday or the end of Year 13, and the local authority's payment rates for foster carers are maintained at pre-18 levels. Twenty-three young people were staying put at the time of the inspection. Young people who met inspectors and who had taken advantage of this option spoke highly of the stability it provided as they progressed their education and, in particular, prepared for university. However, guidance for children looked after, including care leavers, is limited and does not ensure that they know what they are entitled to and how to access it. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors also raised this as an issue. (Recommendation)
90. At the time of the inspection, a participation team had recently been commissioned to improve the involvement of care leavers and to widen opportunities to celebrate young people's successes. A care leavers' forum now meets regularly, produces a newsletter, helps to appoint staff and participates in activities such as visits to Parliament. Celebration events have been reinstated, and a recent achievement evening recognised the progress made by young people not only in education, but also in areas such as overcoming barriers and developing independence skills.

Leadership, management and governance

Good

Summary

Inspectors saw many features of effective leadership and innovation in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The local authority has invested heavily in developing a culture where good social work can flourish. This includes ensuring that a model of coaching is used to enable effective decision-making and to ensure that decisions are owned by those who make them. There is a comprehensive workforce development plan, and the workforce has stabilised over recent years with only a small number of temporary and agency staff. This benefits children and their families in having social workers whom they come to know and trust.

Multi-agency partnerships are well developed and information is shared well. There is a comprehensive joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) which is regularly refreshed, and it gives leaders and managers a clear picture of the needs of local communities. A children and young people plan (CYPP) prioritises effectively the work needed to improve services for children and young people and their families further.

The local authority is a strong and effective corporate parent. There is a commitment to improving outcomes for all children and young people looked after by the local authority. A group of young commissioners has been recruited recently to work alongside the commissioning team to ensure that the views of young people are considered when services are designed and commissioned. These vocal and committed young people have a clear passion for improving the local area.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich children’s services know themselves well, and the strengths and areas for further development that were identified to inspectors were confirmed by this inspection. The local authority has access to a wide range of data and information, which enables it to identify quickly the areas for improvement and to take swift action to address them. Performance management is focused on what needs to happen to make a positive impact for children and young people. The quality of auditing is good, and the audits that were carried out in preparation for this inspection provided a robust analysis of the casework across the social work teams.

Management oversight is apparent in almost all cases. Most work completed is to a high quality, although there is too much variability, in particular in the assessment teams, that results in delays in meeting the needs of children. Management oversight had not identified that the changes to the local authority designated officer function in April 2016 were not robust. Once made aware, the local authority responded very promptly to ensure that children were safe and to restructure the service.

Recording in reports by managers and in supervision is also mostly to a high standard. However, there is some variability across the teams, in particular in detailing the reasons for decisions being taken.

Inspection findings

91. Inspectors saw many features of effective leadership and innovation in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. Leaders and managers have facilitated a range of evidence-based improvements, supported by innovative project work. Social work has thrived due to the good support of members, senior managers and partner agency representatives. As a result, most social work practice is of a good standard.
92. There are clear lines of accountability between the chief executive, the director of children's services and elected members. Regular meetings enable them to have a good understanding of what is happening at the front line. Elected members regularly visit children and young people and ascertain their views.
93. Senior managers are highly visible and are described by staff as approachable. Staff feel listened to and are able to influence service developments through their involvement in task and finish groups, which are set up to push forward improvements. Task and finish groups include staff from all levels, ensuring that they are not driven by a top-down approach. Cases seen by inspectors demonstrate that areas for development identified by the local authority have shown improvement. For example, the voice of the child is clearly seen in case notes and assessments, and a creative range of direct work is used to enable understanding of their wishes and feelings.
94. There are effective links between the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB), the children's services strategic partnership (Children's Trust arrangements), the Safer Greenwich Partnership and other boards. Priorities read across the boards and are derived from the CYPP. The chairs of the children and adult safeguarding boards, as well as the directors of children's and adults' services, meet with the chief executive for support and challenge. There is evidence of challenge that is ensuring that practice is improving, and that it is improving outcomes for children and young people. For example, the safety of children placed out of borough was raised as an issue by the GSCB. This led to mapping where children were placed against crime hotspots. Those living in areas of high crime were all reviewed to ensure that their accommodation was safe and that they were achieving good outcomes.
95. Partnerships are mature and well developed, and partners hold each other to account. Information is shared effectively across the partnerships, allowing links to be made. For example, reports going to different boards highlighted alcohol as a feature of issues such as crime, violence, health, safeguarding and neglect. This was addressed by the partnership, which has now drawn up an overarching alcohol strategy to ensure that these strands are pulled together and addressed consistently.

96. There is a comprehensive JSNA which is regularly refreshed and gives leaders and managers a clear picture of the needs of local communities. Priorities across partnerships are aligned to the JSNA, which allows directors, groups and teams within children's social care to demonstrate how they are meeting the priorities.
97. The commissioning strategy is comprehensive, and ensures that services are commissioned to meet the identified needs of the communities in Greenwich. Services are monitored regularly, and providers state that this process allows them to have a focus on improving outcomes within their areas. A group of young commissioners has been recruited recently to work alongside the commissioning team to ensure that the views of young people are considered when services are designed and commissioned. These vocal and committed young people have a passion for improving the area in which they live. They have already been engaged in evaluating competing tenders for services and in interviewing the incoming director of children's services. Some are also involved in the young assessors' scheme, which evaluates how welcoming the services are for young people. Their views are incorporated into decision making, and they feel listened to and appreciated by the local authority. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) has recently been relaunched, with a participation worker in post to ensure that it has influence.
98. The local authority is an effective corporate parent. There is a strong commitment to improving outcomes for all children and young people looked after by the local authority. This is evident from the focus on improving the educational and health achievements and on the financial commitment to The Point, with its high-quality multi-agency services for young people.
99. There is a good range of data and information, which enables the local authority to identify areas for improvement quickly and to take swift action to address them. This has assisted the authority to make progress on all the issues identified in the previous Ofsted inspections. Data is focused on impact for children and young people, and includes trackers that monitor children in care proceedings, child protection, children in need and early help. It is also used to redesign services, in conjunction with current research and good practice from other local authorities. For example, the process of stepping down children and families to early help services has been redesigned to ensure that they receive the services that they need. Children who are stepped down to early help now have their progress tracked, and cases that are stepped back up to children's social care are reviewed to ensure that lessons are learned about good practice. Learning has ensured that the process is now more robust, and partnership engagement enables children to benefit from a team around the child that is led by a professional who knows them well.
100. Audits are of a high standard and are focused on improving outcomes for children and young people. The audits completed on the cases looked at in depth by inspectors were mostly accurate, identifying clearly the strengths and areas needing further development in the work with children and young people and their families.

101. Weekly and monthly data reports, relating to performance across teams on issues such as timeliness, caseloads, section 47 enquiries and strategy meetings, are prepared by the performance analysis service. This allows managers to identify differences in performance at an individual, team and group level, and to act to address these issues. Inspectors saw mostly good work across the teams, but performance, in particular that in the assessment teams, is variable, resulting in some children, young people and their families not being seen promptly and assessments not being concluded in a timely way. (Recommendation)
102. Inspectors identified that the arrangements to coordinate the responses to concerns about professionals potentially abusing children were not fit for purpose. These had been reviewed to take into account the new national guidance, and the restructured service commenced in April 2016. However, management oversight of the new arrangements was not robust. When this was identified by inspectors, the local authority responded immediately, reviewed all of the cases referred in the last two months and put in place immediate action plans, including changing the structure and management of the team. The response was exemplary and the initial feedback was that no children had been left at risk of significant harm. However, further work is needed to embed the new structure. (Recommendation)
103. Information and data are used effectively across the partnership to target services at the most vulnerable families. For example, the local authority maintains a database of all children with an identified vulnerability. The list is used to identify those children and young people who may be more vulnerable or most at risk, so that services can be targeted effectively. It has also been used to identify hotspots, such as in schools, where swift and appropriate action was taken to reduce risk.
104. The local authority has commissioned a range of innovative services to ensure that the needs of its communities are met. These include the Mockingbird project, designed to offer an 'extended family' approach to fostering, and the Pause project, which is designed to intervene with young women who have had one or more children removed from their care. The project offers support and intensive interventions to interrupt cycles of neglect and to ensure that women do not have more babies until they are able to care for them appropriately. These services are relatively new to Greenwich, so the impact on the local population has yet to be fully evaluated.
105. The number of complaints, compliments and representations has remained relatively stable over the last three years. Better training, management support and use of resolution meetings have improved the number of complaints resolved at stage 1 and within statutory timescales. An annual report details the learning identified, and this is shared well across the organisation.

106. Management oversight is apparent in all cases, and senior managers are involved in decision making when necessary. However, recording of the rationale for decisions is not consistently to a good standard across all of the teams. When further issues arise, it is sometimes difficult to evaluate the reasoning behind previous actions being taken. (Recommendation)
107. Social workers report receiving challenging and supportive reflective supervision. Inspectors saw cases where this was recorded to a very high standard. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of recording. Impact review meetings, chaired by a group leader, are another innovative local approach to enable social workers to reflect on their work and to avoid delays. (Recommendation)
108. Senior leaders and managers in Greenwich have invested heavily in developing a culture where good social work can flourish, including ensuring that a model of coaching is used to enable effective decision making and to ensure that decisions are owned by those who make them. There is a comprehensive workforce development plan, and the workforce has stabilised over recent years. There is now a 10% use of agency staff, which is below London and national levels. Staff are suitably qualified and trained. They are offered opportunities for development to encourage them to stay in Greenwich, and training is offered to team and group leaders to ensure consistency and improvement in leadership. A social work teaching partnership with Goldsmith's, University of London and two other London boroughs is providing opportunities for social workers to develop their skills. Professional educators are used to mentor and coach social workers, and to provide additional reflection.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

The Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB) is successfully delivering against a substantial work programme to ensure that high-quality safeguarding services are provided to children and their families. There are good governance arrangements from local authority senior managers, effective linkages with other strategic bodies and high levels of commitment from partner agencies. The board is led by an experienced and challenging chair.

The GSCB undertakes relevant reviews of serious incidents involving children. This year it has appropriately finalised and published two serious case reviews (SCRs). The learning from these reviews and national SCRs informs the work plan and is shared effectively across the partnership to raise awareness and improve services. An innovative approach to completion of section 11 audits this year has led to a broad range of relevant learning for the GSCB and individual agencies, to improve safeguarding services for Greenwich children further.

The GSCB ensures that high-quality policies, procedures and training are provided for professionals working with children. These are routinely updated to ensure that they reflect current learning and guidance. The GSCB undertakes particularly detailed evaluation of training to assure itself of the quality and relevance to professionals, and to inform further developments. Much high-quality awareness raising and training has also been undertaken to help professionals to support young people with issues relating to peer-on-peer abuse.

The GSCB has undertaken three successful awareness raising campaigns regarding forced marriage and female genital mutilation, e-safety and self-harm. It also held a highly valued conference at the end of 2015, focusing on the safeguarding of young people from risks such as child sexual exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, gang activity and radicalisation. Additionally, the GSCB has actively worked with partner agencies to raise awareness of issues regarding physical chastisement of children within particular cultures in Greenwich.

Although the chair and board members provide a high level of challenge across the partnership regarding their safeguarding practice with children, a stronger level of oversight and quality assurance of the GSCB's own work is required to achieve more timely and effective follow-through of all actions.

Furthermore, the GSCB does not ensure that children's views are considered throughout all of its work.

Recommendations

- Embed the new approaches to quality assurance and oversight of GSCB's work.
- Ensure that the voice of children and young people informs the GSCB's monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding across Greenwich.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

109. The GSCB works effectively to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded. It is achieving this by delivering successfully against a substantial work programme.
110. The GSCB has effective arrangements in place to work with other strategic partnerships to contribute to the planning and priority setting for children. The chairs of the main partnership boards, such as the Safer Greenwich Partnership, the safeguarding adults board, the children's trust and the GSCB, meet regularly to share their respective annual reports and to ensure that shared priorities are in place.
111. The GSCB meets its statutory duties within a strong governance structure. The chair has regular meetings with the local authority chief executive, the director of children's services, the assistant director responsible for children's social care and the lead member. The executive board and the chairs' group coordinate the board's activity. There are 10 work groups that focus on specific issues and undertake development work on key areas, for example training and development, SCRs, child sexual exploitation, missing children and the child death overview panel (CDOP).
112. The GSCB is well managed by an experienced chair who provides strong and challenging leadership to the board, while enabling all partners to contribute their views. Business support for the board is strong and well resourced, with four staff to coordinate the organisation of the board, sub-groups and training.
113. GSCB members attend regularly and are fully committed to progressing the work of the board. The chair appropriately challenges those who have not attended at least 75% of meetings. Financial contributions are received from the relevant key agencies. In addition, they have agreed a contingency fund to commission SCRs when required.
114. The GSCB is linked effectively to many of the formal meetings and groups within the voluntary sector. These include faith groups, the youth crime forum, the Black and minority ethnic (BME) forum and the Greenwich young people's council. These strong links have enabled a good level of awareness raising to be undertaken in the communities in Greenwich regarding child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and trafficking. There has also been much good partnership work to address the issues of physical chastisement.

115. The GSCB receives and reviews a range of relevant reports and updates. Over the past year, these have included the local authority designated officer service, private fostering, child sexual exploitation, missing children and children affected by gangs. The GSCB also maintains an appropriate focus on children at risk of radicalisation and of child trafficking. The GSCB reviews progress from the MsUnderstood project, which focuses on peer-on-peer violence, and other work relating to violence against women and girls. The presentation of reports and documents to the board has resulted in a variety of relevant challenge and actions. For example, analysis of the report on missing in January and February 2016 led to robust challenge by the chair to the local authority about how the data was presented, in order to differentiate between those missing from home and care. Furthermore, the GSCB sought data regarding the number of return home interviews that had been offered to, and accepted by, children. As a result, the local authority reviewed this service and improvements were introduced from May 2016.
116. The GSCB has developed a comprehensive dataset that enables it to undertake routine analysis of key performance measures regarding safeguarding across the partnership. The GSCB is continuing to work with partners to develop this dataset further, including agreeing relevant performance measures with the police, for example in relation to the mandatory reporting of female genital mutilation.
117. Earlier this year, the GSCB identified that it needed to enhance the level of oversight and challenge that it was providing. It was decided to restructure the sub-groups and to create a monitoring and challenge group. The work of this group will include monitoring action plans, approving work completed by the groups, reviewing the dataset, and monitoring the quality assurance and audit programme. The first meeting of this group took place during this inspection. These new arrangements are in their earliest stages of implementation, and it is too soon to evidence the impact on ensuring that quality assurance and oversight are further improved. (Recommendation)
118. The GSCB introduced an innovative and highly effective approach to its section 11 assessments this year. It used an online survey of staff who work with children across the partner agencies. Approximately 3,050 staff completed the survey. Each agency has undertaken a challenge conversation to identify its respective learning. Agencies are currently developing relevant action plans. All involved spoke highly of this new approach and of the depth of learning that is coming from it.
119. The child death overview panel (CDOP) reviews child deaths in the local area, and is currently working productively to complete child death reviews that were delayed pending the outcome of criminal or other investigatory processes (from 27 in March 2015 to 17 in March 2016). The last published CDOP annual report, covering 2014–15, identified 14 premature deaths, of which the vast majority were young babies with life-limiting conditions. Only one death was identified as having 'modifiable factors' that related to parental smoking. There were two suicides, and one of these appropriately led to a SCR. No issues were identified about practices within children's services.

120. The GSCB has published two SCRs during the past year. These SCRs provide detailed multi-agency exploration of the traumatic death of a young person by suicide, and the death of a baby who was living in a highly mobile family. In both cases, key learning was identified quickly and acted upon to improve local safeguarding services ahead of publication. For example, much work has been undertaken over the past year in relation to self-harm by young people. The GSCB cascades the learning from local and national SCRs through training, presentations and email briefings. Most of the social workers spoken to during this inspection confirmed that they are kept up to date with learning from SCRs.
121. The GSCB held a highly valued conference for partner representatives in November 2015. Eighty-one per cent of participants rated the conference as good or excellent. The focus was on local priorities such as reducing risks associated with self-harm, gang activity, child sexual exploitation and protecting young people from radicalisation. Over the last year, the GSCB has also undertaken three successful campaigns to raise awareness of forced marriage, female genital mutilation, e-safety and self-harm. Self-harm was an issue arising from the local SCR. The board's website contains helpful information about gangs for children, parents and carers, and professionals, and how to help children and young people who are being affected by these groups.
122. Most of the policies and procedures are developed as part of the pan-London child protection procedures. These are routinely updated to reflect new guidance and learning from local and national research. Over the past year, the board has effectively developed and launched a range of relevant policies to support further the safeguarding work across the partnership. These have included the neglect strategy, the 'toxic trio' protocol and practice guidance, all of which were developed due to an awareness that professionals often lacked confidence in working with families where these factors are present.
123. The GSCB maintains good oversight of child sexual exploitation services. This has ensured that there is a greater focus on perpetrators, trends and the identification of hotspots. Since the start of 2016, the GSCB has increased its oversight of children who go missing from home and care. However, it is too early to evidence the full impact of the board's work in relation to this vulnerable group of children. The GSCB uses case file audits and surveys effectively to improve multi-agency safeguarding practice for children. For instance, in the past year, the board has successfully undertaken a deep-dive investigation into domestic abuse. This included multi-agency audits of case files, a discussion with a focus group of survivors and a survey of practitioners. The board also undertook a multi-agency file audit of child sexual exploitation cases. All audit and survey activities concluded with thorough analysis of the findings and the development of detailed action plans.

124. The GSCB has sought to gain children's views to inform the work of the board in a number of projects. However, this has yet to be embedded as integral to the board's work. For example, not all the multi-agency audits this year included a consideration of how the views of children and young people inform assessments, planning or intervention. (Recommendation)
125. The GSCB provides a wide range of relevant training across Greenwich, aimed at supporting practitioners and those who work with children. The training is routinely updated to incorporate learning from new national and local issues. The GSCB undertakes detailed evaluations of the training each year. This is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods such as analysis of the feedback from participants, pre- and post-course questionnaires, participative observation, surveys and interviews.
126. The draft annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding children in the Royal Borough of Greenwich 2015–16, which was shared with inspectors prior to publication, provides a detailed overview of the work of the board and partner agencies. It appropriately reports on key areas of safeguarding work such as the quality of early help, support for children at risk of sexual exploitation and the provision of private fostering. The report reviews the progress against its priorities well, while identifying areas for improvement for the coming year.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people 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 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 and young people. 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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, one additional inspector and one social care regulatory inspector.

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