

Royal Borough of Greenwich

Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 9 December 2019 to 13 December 2019

Lead inspector: Andy Whippey
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Senior managers and leaders continue to demonstrate strong drive and ambition for children. As a result, the good quality of work with children and their families in receipt of services has been sustained and improved. Senior managers and leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the strengths and areas for development. They use this knowledge effectively to continually improve services. Political leaders have invested well to ensure that children's needs are prioritised.

Children who need help and protection receive a service that is timely and of good quality. Assessments and plans show careful consideration of the views of children and their families. Multi-agency working is well developed and contributes to children making good progress.

Children in care receive a good service from workers, who know them well. Health and education needs are appropriately prioritised. Carers provide stable homes and are supportive and ambitious for children in their care. Care leavers are mostly well supported and have access to a good range of suitable accommodation. Staff are tenacious and determined in working with care leavers to improve their experiences, which they do with care and sensitivity.

What needs to improve

- Clarity of actions in plans for children and care leavers.
- The frequency, recording and quality of supervision of frontline practice.
- Matching arrangements for children in long-term foster care.
- The oversight of children's care plans by independent reviewing officers (IROs) between reviews.

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

1. Children and families benefit from a good early help offer and have access to a broad range of preventive and targeted services. Good-quality direct work by staff facilitates the building of trusting relationships with children and families. Performance measures indicate that services are having a positive impact on children's lives. In some cases, however, there are minor delays to families being contacted.
2. The Greenwich multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides an effective and timely response to contacts by professionals and members of the public, to ensure that children's needs are met at the earliest opportunity. Contacts in the MASH are responded to quickly, and according to the level of need and risk in the presenting information. Parental consent is routinely sought, or overridden when appropriate, and managers record a clear rationale for decisions. When concerns for children escalate, multi-agency responses to requests for information are managed effectively to ensure that work can be progressed in a timely manner.
3. When children are at risk of immediate harm, prompt action is taken to understand their circumstances and to protect them. Decisions reached at strategy discussions and meetings are appropriate, but some strategy discussions do not include all of the relevant agencies, particularly health professionals.
4. The vast majority of assessments are timely, comprehensive and of good quality. Children's views are taken into account and inform assessment outcomes. Assessments provide succinct evidence of risks to children and a clear analysis. They demonstrate a focus on parents' capacity to meet the current and future needs of children. Social workers give good consideration to family history, culture and ethnicity.
5. The quality of child in need and child protection plans is variable. In a minority of plans, the lack of clarity regarding the actions required makes it difficult for

parents to understand what they need to do differently to improve their children's experiences, and for professionals to establish whether progress is being made and risks are reducing. Case records do not consistently evidence progress made against plans, and this is hampered by the lack of specific, measurable and time-limited actions. Core groups and child in need meetings are consistently held, and most include good participation from partner agencies, particularly schools.

6. When children in need, including those in need of protection, are identified as being at increased risk or need, the level of intervention is increased accordingly. Decisions to 'step down' are mostly appropriate and are based on an assessment of reduced risk.
7. Pre-proceedings activity, under the public law outline, is increasingly used when child protection plans are not effective in reducing risks to children. Legal planning meetings demonstrate a comprehensive discussion of risks and clarity of decision-making. In most cases, social workers ensure that families understand the nature of the risks to children and know what they need to do to minimise and resolve these concerns. Actions from legal planning meetings are tracked effectively to monitor progress, and prompt action is taken when children's circumstances do not improve.
8. Social workers know their children well and are clear about what needs to be achieved, seeking children's wishes and finding out about their feelings during their timely visits. However, case recording does not always reflect the good quality of the work being undertaken. Supervision varies in frequency and quality, and recording does not consistently evidence reflection, analysis or rigour to drive and monitor children's progress against their plans.
9. Disabled children have access to a wide range of specialist services to meet their complex needs. Children and families benefit from having consistent social workers who have a good understanding of their individual needs. Social workers use a range of methods and observations to ascertain children's views. These views are clearly incorporated into assessments.
10. There is an effective response when children go missing from home, although managers are aware that the quality and timeliness of return home interviews are not yet consistently good enough. Information from return home interviews is used effectively to inform individual risk assessments, and aggregated information informs the identification of wider risks to children.
11. Staff take effective action to reduce risks to children who are considered highly vulnerable and at risk of exploitation. Appropriate intervention to protect children at risk of sexual and other forms of exploitation is diligently pursued. Social workers understand the complexity of risks to children and this is given significant consideration and analysis in risk assessments, though these are not always updated in the light of changes to children's circumstances. Safety plans

are often devised to identify what needs to happen to keep children safe. The Greenwich Risk Adolescent Safeguarding and Prevention (GRASP) panel has a strong commitment to partnership working and information-sharing. The wide focus of the panel to include all forms of exploitation enables effective oversight of the full range of safeguarding concerns affecting young people. Innovative work through the CURB (Connect, Unite, Resist, Begin) programme is already showing impact on the identification and support of children who may be at risk in their communities.

12. The children missing education team has appropriate protocols in place to ensure that children missing education are found. The team works closely with other services, schools and neighbouring boroughs to identify the whereabouts of children missing education. This joined-up approach means that information is shared readily and used effectively through well-established routes.
13. Staff form positive relationships with families of children who are educated at home. If safeguarding concerns arise, they are escalated appropriately.
14. Children known to be living in private fostering arrangements are safeguarded effectively. They are visited regularly and seen alone. Assessments of need are up to date, and children are given the opportunity to talk about any concerns or worries that they may have while living away from their families. Senior managers have worked hard to raise awareness of private fostering since the last inspection, and they ensure that private fostering information is translated into a wide range of languages to reflect the diverse communities in the borough.
15. Young people who are aged 16 and 17 and at risk of homelessness receive timely and effective support. Supported accommodation is available as required, to allow time to assess their longer-term needs. Appropriate assessments are undertaken with young people and their families, with a focus on returning home if it safe and in their best interests. Young people are supported well to understand their rights and entitlements to come into care, and to make informed decisions.
16. The response to allegations against professionals is much improved since the last inspection. Allegations are now dealt with thoroughly and swiftly by the designated officer. Effective and well-established links with partner agencies are in place and allegations are progressed in a sensitive and timely way.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: good

17. Social workers make concerted efforts to ensure that children remain with their families when this is safe for them. In the vast majority of cases, decisions that children should come into care are made within timescales that meet the child's needs. When children need to come into care, they receive effective and

sensitive intervention. This includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who receive a strong, supportive and quick response to their needs.

18. Children are looked after within their extended birth family whenever possible. Assessments of potential carers within the family are timely and they are completed thoroughly, identifying how the longer-term needs of children will be met. Children living with connected persons or special guardians benefit from effective support plans.
19. Adoption is routinely considered at an early stage for those children unable to live with their birth or extended families. The timeliness of adoptions is improving and is better than the national average. Recruitment processes for adopters are thorough and the assessment, training and support for adopters are sound. The agency decision-maker and adoption panel chair provide effective scrutiny and challenge. Good-quality assessments inform well-considered decisions about whether brothers or sisters should be placed together. Carefully planned introductions prepare adopters and children well and ensure a smooth transition for children as they move from foster care to live with their adoptive parents.
20. The vast majority of children and young people benefit from living in a wide range of placement arrangements with their brothers and sisters, if appropriate, and in placements that meets their needs. This includes children in specialist provision and those in out-of-area placements. Preventive support is provided if disruption is anticipated.
21. Many children placed with long-term carers have not been formally matched. This means that there has been no formal assessment of the carers' ability to meet the needs of the children in the longer term, or for children and carers to experience the emotional security of knowing that these arrangements are permanent. Plans are in place to address this, but the issue has been known for some time and progress has been slow.
22. Social workers know children well and visit them frequently. Most visits to children are well recorded, and their wishes and feelings are clear. Social workers are positive about and ambitious for children, and support them in their interests. Contact between the children and their families is planned effectively and managed well. Effective life-story work is undertaken with children who are matched with adoptive parents. However, direct work with other children in care to help them to understand their life stories and experiences is not consistently evident on their records.
23. Social workers recognise and respond well to children in care who are vulnerable to exploitation. This includes identifying multiple risks from sexual exploitation, missing from care and criminal exploitation. Risk assessments identify potential and actual risks to children well, but they are not consistently updated to reflect changes in children's circumstances.

24. The health needs of children in care are identified well and are reflected in their care plans. Health assessments are consistently undertaken in a timely manner. The assessments are thorough and result in detailed healthcare plans. Children's emotional health needs are prioritised, and a range of appropriate support is available.
25. The virtual school is well established and well respected. The team maintains effective oversight of the educational progress of children in care, and there is a greater focus on more vulnerable pupils. Children make positive progress from their starting points at the time of entry to care. Personal education plans are highly detailed and of a consistently good quality; they are mostly reviewed each term and identify the support that each child needs. The pupil premium is used well to provide tailored interventions in accordance with children's educational and emotional health needs. Additional support is provided through an impressive homework club, which offers a range of educational and enrichment activities, and is highly valued by both children and foster carers.
26. Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved within appropriate timescales. Assessments are comprehensive and consider the impact of fostering on the whole family. The fostering panel carries out its core duties diligently and makes timely and appropriate recommendations. The information provided to panel is of a good standard. Foster carers benefit from a wide range of training opportunities and they are well supported.
27. While IROs undertake timely reviews of children in almost all cases, they are not consistently ensuring that decisions are evident on children's records. Consequently, some care plans for children are not being updated to reflect children's current circumstances. In addition, IROs are not consistently reviewing the progress of care plans for children or contacting them if there are significant changes between reviews.
28. Children benefit from support from advocates to help them to share their views in reviews or to make complaints about the service that they receive. A strong commitment to independent visitor support means that high numbers of children benefit from this provision.
29. Relationships between care leavers and their personal advisers are strong. Social workers and personal advisers demonstrate empathy and understanding when talking about 'their' young people. Personal advisers make considerable and sustained efforts to see young people regularly, including care leavers who are in custody. The quality of pathway plans is variable and not all include achievable targets and actions. Plans do not always indicate the degree to which they are co-produced with care leavers, meaning that it is not always clear as to the level of care leavers' participation in planning for their future. Pathway plans are not consistently reviewed when care leavers' circumstances change.

30. Care leavers benefit from a wide range of accommodation, and there is good use of 'staying put' arrangements, including for young adults in their twenties. The majority of care leavers are in education, employment or training, and there is a good focus on engaging young people in such activities by their personal advisers. If care leavers are also parents, personal advisers advocate strongly to ensure that the needs of the whole family are addressed. Senior managers are proactive in developing opportunities for care leavers through the creation of a number of apprenticeships.
31. The views of children in care are regularly sought, and the children in care council and care leaver forum contribute actively and thoughtfully with regard to plans for service development. Care leavers have been involved in the creation and implementation of the strong local offer that identifies their rights and entitlements.

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

32. Senior managers and elected members have continued to ensure that children in Greenwich receive a good service, and they have acted effectively to build on the findings of the previous inspection in 2016. Strong governance arrangements ensure effective prioritisation to improve well-being, safety and positive experiences for children. Corporate commitment to children's services is evident, backed up by financial support for the delivery of core services.
33. Partnerships at both strategic and operational levels are strong. Priorities are aligned, particularly regarding safeguarding vulnerable adolescents. Consequently, risks are shared and managed across the partnership, and strengths and areas for development are understood well. Managers have a positive relationship with the children and family court advisory and support service (Cafcass) and the local judiciary, which report a positive and quick response to any issues that they raise. Effective and visible partnership-working is evident in the joined-up arrangements for working with young people at risk from various forms of exploitation.
34. Senior managers are ambitious for children and strive for continuous improvement. They actively seek out innovation and learning opportunities. Areas in need of improvement identified at previous inspections have been addressed successfully. These include improvements to the handling of allegations against professionals, and the implementation of a range of ways to ensure that children who are at risk of exploitation are safeguarded, including the development of the GRASP panel. The strategic multi-agency child exploitation group continues to monitor the actions resulting from the joint targeted area inspection in 2018.

35. The senior management team has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for further development in frontline practice. Senior leaders are highly committed, active and visible. Regular face-to-face meetings between the chief executive, the director of children's services and elected members are informed by relevant and up-to-date performance information. Operational managers are available and supportive. However, frontline management is too variable. Supervision does take place and staff value the formal supervision and informal advice and guidance, but the frequency and the quality of supervision are inconsistent. Some case records do not contain evidence that children's circumstances are being routinely and regularly considered. The range varies from high-quality, reflective supervision that provides clear understanding and guidance, through to very brief, task-focused notes. Also, while managers have been aware for some time of the need to formalise permanence planning for some children in long-term foster care, this has not yet been achieved, leaving those children in unconfirmed arrangements for too long.
36. Leaders and managers embrace their role as corporate parents and have applied vigour in progressing action plans to improve the lives of children in care and care leavers. A clear line of accountability and an established infrastructure of meetings and panels demonstrate momentum in improving services and practice to children in care and care leavers. The corporate parenting board receives regular performance data and reports, enabling effective scrutiny and challenge. The board maintains a strong focus on achieving positive outcomes for children in care and care leavers, such as increasing employment opportunities for care leavers and enrichment opportunities for children in care. Young people's views are sought and their involvement in shaping services is sensitively facilitated.
37. Performance management systems capture a wide range of relevant data across the organisation. This information not only provides senior managers with aggregated data across the service, but also provides team-level data, which enables team and service managers to identify any emerging performance shortfalls in their area of responsibility, and to respond accordingly.
38. Senior managers undertake a high number of relevant audits relating to a wide range of service delivery. This contributes to their well-informed understanding of areas that require improvement. Trends and themes from audits are used effectively to inform the training and development programme. Actions from audits are identified, with routine follow-up to ensure that they are completed. Social workers are appropriately involved in the completion of audits, to help their understanding of what constitutes good or outstanding practice. Senior managers are aware of the need for audits to better evidence the impact of practice on the experiences and progress of the child and have plans in place to address this.

39. Senior leaders recognise that the provision of high-quality social work services relies on a well-trained, supported and motivated workforce. Staff feel valued and supported and enjoy working in Greenwich. They have manageable caseloads and they like their work. A comprehensive approach to recruitment, retention and development has had a positive impact on growing and retaining an experienced and skilled workforce. Staff turnover is low and there is little use of agency staff. A strong training and development programme and flexible promotion opportunities mean that many staff see their careers developing positively over a period of time in Greenwich. Both newly qualified social workers and experienced staff feel that their support and development needs are met well. This stable and well-supported workforce means that children in Greenwich develop consistent and long-standing social work relationships with skilled and confident staff.
40. Opportunities for workforce learning are well established and influence how services are developed. Learning from serious case reviews and learning reviews is established and well publicised, to help to inform current social work practice.



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