# Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

## London Borough of Hounslow

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**Reporting inspector** **Stephen Hart HMI**

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# About this inspection

1. The purpose of this inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of a core membership of three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), and two inspectors from the Care Quality Commission. Three additional inspectors supported the team in file reading and in covering the two day absence of one member of the core team. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.

2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- a range of existing evidence and reports including a review of the children and young people's plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision, the evaluations of the serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *Working Together To Safeguard Children*, 2006

- a review of 20 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting and recording undertaken

- the report of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres undertaken in June 2009

- discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.

# The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

| | |
|---|---|
| Outstanding (Grade 1) | A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements |
| Good (Grade 2) | A service that exceeds minimum requirements |
| Adequate (Grade 3) | A service that only meets |

| | |
|---|---|
| | minimum requirements |
| Inadequate (Grade 4) | A service that does not meet minimum requirements |

# Service information

4. The London Borough of Hounslow has a resident population of approximately 226,000 which includes just over 59,000 (or 26%) children and young people aged 18 or younger. Approximately 63% of Hounslow's population is white but demographic change is likely to be significant in the mid term with new communities, particularly from European Union Accession States, continuing to establish themselves in the area. Some 67% of the school population is from non white ethnic groups. More than 170 languages are spoken in Hounslow with 47.9% of children having a language other than English as their first language. On the combined index of income, employment and education, Hounslow is one of the most deprived boroughs in West London with hidden areas of deprivation, such as those in Feltham West, Hanworth and Isleworth contrasting with more well-off areas such as Chiswick.

5. Hounslow has a number of strategic partnerships. The Children and Young People Strategic Partnership was established in 2004 and, before being superseded by the Hounslow Children's Trust, included broad representation from Hounslow NHS, Metropolitan Police, schools, community and voluntary sector representatives and the Learning and Skills Council. The Children's Trust itself, which is just about to be launched, will have sufficiently broad representation but final membership details are to be confirmed. The Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board brings together the main organisations that work together with children and families in Hounslow to protect and safeguard children. These include representatives of the borough council, four local NHS Trusts, the Metropolitan Police service, schools and the voluntary sector.

6. Children's social care services are delivered through a network of three locality teams, supported by borough-wide children with disability, adoption and fostering teams, a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), the youth offending service and an emergency out of hours service. Sixty-eight extended schools, universal and targeted youth services and a network of 14 children's centres, which will increase to 18, are strategically located to serve identified areas of need. At the time of the inspection, there were 342 looked after children aged 0–18 years with almost 90% placed in foster care. The local authority directly provides foster care placements in 94 households and commissions other placements from approved independent fostering agencies. The council provides six places in a residential children's home and a further eight places in a residential home for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Two hundred and sixteen children were subject to child protection plans, a figure which reflects a rising trend of section 47 enquiries over the last year. Only 9% of children become the subject of second

or further plans, a figure below that of statistical neighbours and national averages.

7. Commissioning and planning for national health services and primary care are the responsibility of Hounslow NHS. Community health services are largely provided by Hounslow and Richmond Community Health Services. Acute hospital services are largely provided by West Middlesex University Hospital, although services are also provided at Imperial, Ealing and Ashford St Peter's Trusts. Mental health services are provided by West London Mental Health Trust and substance misuse services are provided by Central and North West Mental Health Foundation Trust. Primary care health services in HM young offenders institution (YOI) Feltham are provided by Serco, with specialist mental health services provided by West London Mental Health Trust, substance misuse services by Central and North West Mental Health Foundation Trust and sexual health services by the West Middlesex University Hospital Trust.

8. Hounslow has 57 primary schools and 14 secondary schools providing for its child population. The pupil referral unit provides for children excluded from school and for young people with emotional and behaviour disorders. There are 108 places overall.

# The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

## Overall effectiveness Grade 2 (Good)

9. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Hounslow is good. The Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board actively promotes awareness of safeguarding in the borough and provides good leadership on safeguarding matters. The recently appointed, experienced independent chair is working to secure developments in the structure and processes of the board to capitalise further on the already good quality work undertaken by its subgroups and professional advisors. Integrated multi-agency policies and procedures are up to date and are consistent with the pan-London safeguarding and child protection procedure documents to ensure that practice is consistent across the metropolitan area and a good range of highly regarded training is widely available.

10. The safeguarding and child protection needs of children are responded to well and there is strong evidence across the partnership that all practice is underpinned by an acute sense of responsibility and accountability. The impact of the common assessment framework (CAF) is good and successful training has led to significant degrees of confidence in agencies across the partnership being willing to initiate multi-agency assessments or becoming lead professionals in 'teams around the child'.

11. Significant, planned action has been taken since the recent annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements (June 2009) and the backlog of cases which impacted upon the efficiency of the service has been cleared. Management has been enhanced by additional appointments and there is rigour in risk management and decision making which is supported by the development and dissemination of revised and well understood thresholds for service. Initial and core assessments of children in need, including those that are undertaken as part of Section 47 enquiries, are increasingly timely. There is clear evidence that assessments carried out following the unannounced inspection achieve greater consistency in securing the involvement of other agencies and professionals. This has led to improved analysis, risk management and follow up action, including legal interventions. However the timeliness of initial child protection conferences remains a concern with only 27% being completed within 15 days. Although an area targeted for improvement, it is too early to see evidence of sustainable improvement. All cases are suitably allocated to qualified social workers and scrutiny arrangements are rigorous and effective with all child protection review conferences held on time. Further work is underway to continue to improve the timeliness and quality of recording in order to ensure that there is clarity about the nature and timeliness of decisions and actions.

12. One serious case review was completed and evaluated by Ofsted as inadequate. The statement of action taken by the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board in response to the inadequate aspects of the serious case review process was judged satisfactory. The serious case review identified significant areas of deficiency in the management and conduct of the case in 2006, preceding the current leadership of the service. A further serious case review is currently underway. It is very complex and relates to matters alleged to have occurred eight years ago. Bringing it to conclusion has been very challenging, not least because of protracted and continuing, contested criminal proceedings of a serious nature.

13. Robust performance management arrangements within children's services are good and extend to individual cases. They are supported by internal and external management audits which are conducted on 'dip sampling' and thematic bases. Supervision is regular and focused. The outcomes of case discussions are recorded on supervision and case files, kept under scrutiny and progress chased when necessary. The Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board also has a programme of measuring the impact of services and the effectiveness of joint working through the work of an effective, dedicated multi-disciplinary sub-group.

## Capacity for improvement Grade 2 (Good)

14. Capacity for improvement is good. Safeguarding and child protection are an established top priority across the partnership and its importance is tangible

across the area and at all levels in organisations. Politicians, managers and staff are united in ensuring that these areas continue to be closely monitored and evaluated. Emerging risks are targeted and there is good awareness of the breadth of subject matter that falls within the scope of safeguarding. For example, the police in conjunction with a range of partners have recognised and responded to the safeguarding concerns that affect young people who may become involved in activity that could be linked to violent extremism and there is a range of diversionary activity which is appropriately supported by community and religious leaders. There is also very good work undertaken in relation to domestic violence. Mothers who have been victims described excellent project work which has enabled them to support their children in very difficult circumstances, while making decisions which significantly impact upon their own lives. Schools participate in the Learning to Respect domestic violence education programme which has been nationally recognised as having made a significant impact on safeguarding in the borough.

15. The revised Children and Young People's Plan sets clear and measurable priorities for improvement based upon a rigorous re-assessment of need. The priorities are supported by resources and there is strong evidence from across the partnership that the delivery of these priorities will be secure in the immediate future, despite realistic predictions of unprecedented financial challenges as a result of the economic climate. The work that has been done to eradicate the financial deficit in the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the drive in children's services to create a leaner and more efficient organisation, in part as a result of the work in support of the corporate Performance Improvement Programme, are the cornerstones upon which the response to the challenges are currently based. The strength of strategic partnerships, including the newly formed Children's Trust, and the long history of excellent multi-disciplinary working arrangements at the front line of services are significant in identifying further areas of potential efficiency gain and opportunities for effective partnership, shared services or consortia opportunities.

16. There is also demonstrable evidence in the actions taken in response to the unannounced inspection of safeguarding to show that the partnership is committed to remaining alert to opportunities to improve practice. The recent re-organisation of the children's service structure makes the service more responsive to safeguarding and child protection concerns and the increasing use of integrated or virtual teams has made this work evidently more effective.

17. Service users play an important role in influencing service development and increasingly their experience of receiving services is used as part of a comprehensive performance management approach to inform practice and strategic processes. For example the outcome of the 'Care Leavers Wish List', a consultation exercise to establish the preparedness of young people for independent living, was debated at the Corporate Parenting Panel and informed the leaving care team plan.

## Areas for improvement

18. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in the London Borough of Hounslow, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

**Immediately:**

- improve the timeliness of initial child protection conferences

**Within three months:**

- develop and begin to implement a strategy to improve the recording of case records with particular attention being given to ensuring that all plans are measurable and set within a timescale

**Within six months:**

- action should be taken to ensure that all personnel records are consolidated and contents of staff files are fully compliant with local and national requirements.

## Outcomes for children and young people

**The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 2 (Good)**

19. The effectiveness of services in Hounslow to ensure that children and young people are safe is good. Outcomes show that partners are effective in identifying children and young people who are in need of safeguarding and child protection services. Multi-agency training is well established and ensures that all staff are equipped with the skills to recognise risk and to refer concerns about particular children. Management capacity to oversee front line work has been enhanced and there is clear evidence of a rigorous approach to assessment and analysis which was not sufficiently consistent before the reorganisation of children's social care services and the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements.

20. The proportion of good or better safeguarding inspection judgements exceeds national averages in institutional settings, including residential care and schools. The adoption and fostering services have also both been judged good in their most recent inspections. Rigorous action planning by the early years professionals is producing a significant upturn in good or better judgements in childminding provision, though these data are currently unvalidated. The local

young offenders institution has a dedicated safeguarding team led by a social work trained governor who is a member of the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board. Good operational relationships ensure that safeguarding concerns affecting detainees are raised and dealt with promptly, an essential requirement as the average length of residence in the YOI is less than five weeks.

21. The Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board has a history of playing a significant leadership role among professional groups and the community and a safeguarding culture is well established. For example, in the West Middlesex University Hospital accident and emergency department assessments are undertaken of all children of patients deemed to be vulnerable adults. The positive work of the board sub-groups ensures that service development is supported by evaluative and performance management material. The appointment of an independent chair coincides with a plan to strengthen the strategic influence of the board and its good links with the Children's Trust. These are both logical developments to build upon the good and respected work undertaken by the outgoing chair, the Director of Children's Services.

22. Staff recruitment and vetting processes are consistent with guidance and regulation. They are supported by comprehensive and clear policies and procedures. However file construction is not clear and records may be held or recorded in more than one place thereby posing a risk to an otherwise robust process. The partnership is effective in identifying new priorities and is swift to act when required, for example in developing and implementing a response when a newly established population of Somali children and young people were becoming victims of bullying. In addition, multi-agency work in relation to domestic violence, which involved locating a social worker in the police led domestic violence team, and an increased demand for child protection services following a high profile national case both received well targeted attention leading to good outcomes.

**The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 2 (Good)**

23. Good action ensures that children and young people in Hounslow feel safe. Ensuring young people are safe from crime and anti-social behaviour continues to be a key element of the new Community Safety Strategy 2008-2011 and is supported by multi-agency partnership work. Targeted action has resulted in the deployment of seven school beat officers and three school police community support officers to work across the 14 secondary schools in the borough. Nineteen transport police community support officers and six police officers are deployed to travel on particular bus routes where assessment shows most disorder has taken place. Continuous active monitoring of anti-social behaviour affecting schools is undertaken by the police to identify any trends or issues of concern that need more targeted responses. Bullying has also been a focus of action with good outcomes reported. A range of age appropriate work has been undertaken across the borough to improve the feeling of safety and address fear of crime among young people. Activities are

wide-ranging, including advice on risks along a spectrum from staying safe in school through to the dangers of serious gang-related crime. In the survey of children and young people undertaken as a part of this inspection, 96% reported that they felt safe or very safe, a figure that is significantly higher than that in the earlier Tellus survey, which had led to the range of actions described above.

*These are the grades for the quality of outcomes for children and young people*

| | |
|---|---|
| Children are safe: the effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe | 2 |
| Children feel safe: the effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe | 2 |

## The quality of provision Grade 2 (Good)

24. The quality of safeguarding provision is good overall. There are clear and agreed thresholds for access to safeguarding services and as a result of concerted action, they are widely understood across the partnership. Referrals are more clearly related to need and increased use is being made of the CAF, which has become central to early intervention and prevention services. Very good outcomes have been achieved by highly effective work within multi-disciplinary CAF arrangements, for example an initiative which has significantly reduced exclusions from school.

25. Following national publicity about high profile child abuse cases, there has been a considerable focus upon child protection, with a significant rise in section 47 enquiries. Despite significantly increased workload pressures, responses in these cases have been timely in terms of assessment; 80% of initial assessments and 78% of core assessments are completed within seven and 35 days respectively, performance which significantly exceeds and matches national performance respectively. Case planning has improved, although documented plans sometimes fail to reflect the quality of the work being carried out, a finding reflected in an independent audit of cases selected for this inspection. The audit also showed additional causes for concern in some cases relating to the quality of assessment and intervention. However these findings related to work undertaken before management action was taken to improve performance in these key areas. Evidence from a subsequent sample of 12 more recent cases demonstrated significantly improved assessment, outcome focused planning and practice. Although recording remains inconsistent, there is good evidence that management decisions made in supervision are recorded diligently.

26. Parents and carers are involved at appropriate stages of the safeguarding process. The survey of children and young people undertaken during this

inspection shows that they are also involved, with the large majority considering that they have a positive and direct impact upon the outcome, a finding that was mirrored by young people interviewed as part of this inspection. A lack of sufficient independent reviewing officers to chair child protection conferences resulted in a significant fall in the number of initial conferences held within 15 days. However there is evidence that multi-disciplinary child protection and safeguarding work continued, despite delays in conferencing. Any necessary legal action was instigated to secure the safety and well-being of children. Action has been planned to redress this situation, which will ultimately require additional resources but it is too early to identify sustainable results.

27. Direct work with children and young people who use safeguarding and child protection services is particularly strong. The partnership has invested significantly in offering staff the opportunity to develop the therapeutic skills necessary to intervene effectively in a range of circumstances. Outstanding work with young people with significant learning difficulties, whose parents are experiencing major problems in the management of their children, and with young people exhibiting highly challenging behaviour, has made a significant impact on the safety of the children and young people concerned. Much work of this type is undertaken as part of a detailed plan in conjunction with other professionals. It is managed well and oversight and re-assessment of risk are central to the supervisory task.

28. There are excellent and highly effective safeguarding partnerships characterised by good communication at all levels of the organisation. For example, the specialist health visitor is alerted to all children who are diagnosed as having a learning difficulty or disability so that monitoring of family stress can take place and to ensure that appropriate services can be accessed if required. Revised and significantly improved multi-agency arrangements and practices to track and locate children who are missing from home, school or care are thorough, clearly understood by professionals and have been implemented to good effect in a range of situations.

29. Professional challenge across the partnership is well established and seen as a positive feature of joint work. This is particularly evident in the formal child protection processes, where decisions and perceived failures to act upon child protection plans are routinely subject to rigorous scrutiny by front line professionals and independent reviewing officers. These processes contribute to the confidence of children and young people in their case review processes as a means of ensuring that good outcomes are being achieved, as reported in the confidential Ofsted survey. Partners work well together to focus upon the needs of children and young people and to ensure good outcomes. For example, incisive early intervention to address key parenting issues has been highly successful in preventing breakdown in family relationships and is being further developed as a key element of the early intervention service.

30. A performance management culture is firmly established across the partnership, enabling the priorities of the revised Children and Young People's Plan to be evaluated for effectiveness. In addition, a wide range of relevant data about most aspects of children's service is collected and analysed. Data are increasingly used to identify and measure outcomes. Children's social care and education services are well advanced in this regard but, more recently, an increased focus on outcomes within the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and Trust has meant that partner agencies are increasingly engaged.

31. Children and young people are told how to complain and information about complaints is widely available across the area in different formats. The service user survey reinforces that most young people are aware of the action they need to take if they wish to complain about social care services. They are also aware of the availability of advocates to support them. Action taken to resolve complaints at early stages and high levels of satisfaction with the response of social care staff have resulted in a low number of complaints progressing to formal stages, with only one progressing to formal stages in the last year. The arrangements for children and young people who make complaints against staff working with children are well developed and effective. Significant awareness raising on this subject has resulted in referrals being submitted by agencies across the partnership and most have been investigated and completed within one month, with only the most complex ones taking longer.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

| | |
|---|---|
| Service responsiveness including complaints | 2 |
| Assessment and direct work with children | 2 |
| Case planning, reviews and recording | 3 |

## Leadership and management Grade 2 (Good)

32. Leadership and management of safeguarding services are good. Priorities are appropriately ambitious, clear and shared. Over the last three years, the current management team has developed a learning culture across children's services which has engendered in managers and staff a willingness to seek imaginative solutions to challenges at strategic and practice levels. Safeguarding strategies and their accompanying policies and procedures support practice well, are updated and aligned to the pan London safeguarding and child protection policies. The Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board is central to developments and work is underway to strengthen the relationship with the new Children's Trust to ensure that safeguarding and child protection remain a central theme of the Trust's work.

33. Information sharing protocols are well established. There is good evidence that the culture of collaborative working on the basis of shared information is established to good effect, with positive outcomes in individual cases and effective identification of new or changing local priorities. Work undertaken in the accident and emergency and paediatric departments of West Middlesex University Hospital in relation to their inter-disciplinary approach to safeguarding and joint work between the police and social workers in relation to domestic violence are two notable examples.

34. Performance management arrangements ensure rigorous attention is given to all aspects of service and reporting arrangements are extensive and challenging. Areas for attention are identified and are targeted for action and monitoring. Performance against national and local indicators has improved and most are good or better, with the exception of initial child protection conferences. Workforce planning is imaginative, recruitment practice is compliant with statute and guidance, and some significant inroads have been made into long standing recruitment difficulties in some key areas. For example, using creative training and supervision, learning assistants in schools have been trained to take on some tasks that would otherwise be undertaken by qualified speech and language therapists. Social workers have been recruited from abroad and careful induction and support have enabled good retention. Health visitor shortages has resulted in re-defining work in key areas to ensure that priorities are tackled and wider community nursing resources are deployed to best effect.

35. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Hounslow has a long history of ensuring that safeguarding outcomes for children and young people from minority groups are at least good. Vulnerable groups are identified early and, where necessary, receive sensitive and targeted services. Work with asylum-seeking young people, children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young offenders and vulnerable groups has been highly successful. There is clear evidence across the partnership that agencies, including the voluntary sector, are alert to emerging challenge. Work undertaken with groups of young people with the potential to become involved in knife crime, gang culture or violent extremism has been imaginative and effective, with evidence of young people being diverted from such activity. Parents of disabled children were mainly very positive about the personal services and support they received, although some expressed frustration about some of the resource constraints affecting speech and language and physiotherapy services and particularly with changes to the ‘blue badge’ car parking scheme. Vulnerable groups have excellent opportunities to make an impact upon their individual case plans and upon service development and, where necessary, advocates or interpreters are readily available to provide support. Young people are particularly positive about community cohesion in the borough. A recent DVD professionally produced by looked after young people expresses a strong conviction that the equality and diversity agenda is an important, integral element of all services they receive. Service user engagement is good and the partnership has created a culture in which

children, young people and their parents and carers have a wide range of good opportunities to contribute their views which directly affect outcomes.

36. Achieving value for money has been a key issue for this authority and good progress has been made. There is a political imperative to negate the need for council tax increases and a recent corporate initiative has set a target of £50m of savings over a three year period. Partners in children's services have also experienced extreme financial challenge and the PCT is emerging from a three year 'turnaround programme' designed to balance its budget for the first time. Against this backcloth, the successful preservation of services at the front line is testimony to good quality and informed planning and strengthened commissioning arrangements, which have produced good levels of efficiency while promoting and defining quality requirements. These have supported good outcomes for children and young people. Some unit costs remain comparatively high but these are inflated by a legacy of historical procurement of high cost placements in which young people are too well settled to consider a further placement move.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

| | |
|---|---|
| Ambition and prioritisation | 2 |
| Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development | 2 |
| User engagement | 2 |
| Partnerships | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 1 |
| Value for money | 2 |

# The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

## Overall effectiveness Grade 2 (Good)

37. The effectiveness of services for looked after children and care leavers is good overall. Leadership across the partnership has resulted in a shared vision for all professionals working with looked after children. The vision has been accompanied by the development of a range of services to ensure that children and young people's life chances are maximised. Significant progress has been made in relation to children and young people's health and similar outcomes in relation to progress and attainment have been achieved in education. Good progress over the last two years has resulted in a reduction in school days lost to exclusion with minimal use of permanent exclusion and less frequent use of fixed term exclusion. Since the beginning of the current school year, 12 young people have been excluded for fixed terms totalling 28 days. Statutory requirements are met well and there is a good track record of improvement in service quality, for example in fostering and adoption services, educational attainment, and achieving low rates of looked after children and young people involved in criminal activity.

38. Targets for improving services are ambitious and are consistently met. For example, the Children and Young People's Plan identified the need for improved placement choice for looked after young people. Through a combination of increased numbers of foster carers being successfully recruited and the introduction, through good commissioning and procurement practice, of preferred providers of care services, significant improvements in placement choice and stability have been achieved over the last two years. All initiatives are kept under close scrutiny, through a combination of established performance management and quality assurance arrangements. These are particularly effective at practice level, where plans for children and their impact on outcomes are scrutinised in supervision and in statutory reviews. These processes have ensured that value for money has been demonstrably achieved. Effective commissioning in particular has resulted in savings which have added to the children's services contribution to the corporate Performance Improvement Programme.

39. Workforce planning has ensured that all looked after children have been appropriately allocated to qualified social workers. Good partnership work has meant that their health and educational needs have been met and actively promoted through the work of dedicated teams, supported by good access to specialist services such as those provided by the child and adolescent mental health service.

40. Children and young people are given every opportunity to contribute to care planning and review and latest data show that over 90% took advantage of this opportunity. Children and young people interviewed and surveyed during

this inspection were extremely complimentary about the borough's responsiveness; between 85% and 90% were clear that their contributions to reviews and other forums made a difference to their circumstances. Survey respondents were unanimous that they were in placements which best meet their needs. The developing children in care council and looked after children's contribution to the corporate parenting panel are good initiatives, which result in children and young people having direct and demonstrable impact upon service delivery and strategic planning. Increasingly these developments are recognised by councillors as important contributions and challenges to their function as corporate parents. After a relatively slow start, and with scope for improvement, there is now good evidence of momentum building towards all members of the council receiving regular reports about services which directly affect vulnerable groups including looked after children.

## Capacity for improvement Grade 2 (Good)

41. The partnership has good capacity for improvement. There is a full acceptance of corporate responsibility for looked after children and young people and a conscious awareness of opportunities to identify gaps in services and secure improvements which sustain improved outcomes. Performance data are kept under constant scrutiny at a range of forums and any deteriorating or stagnating trends are subject to further scrutiny and evaluation. At a corporate level this scrutiny is an essential element of the chief executive's drive to ensure that value for money is achieved.

42. Good progress has been made to ensure continual improvement in services for young people. The services provided by the outstanding Westbrook Children's Home and the good adoption and fostering teams are notable examples. In addition, support services such as those provided by the looked after children education and health teams make consistently good or outstanding contributions to the overall quality of services and outcomes. Where services are identified as being weaker or in need of development, rigorous action is taken which is closely monitored and evaluated for impact. Where new services are required, there is good evidence of the partnership being prepared to re-commission or to change priorities as a result. For example, the behaviour management service has had a significant impact on enabling young people and those caring for them to develop the skills and techniques necessary to manage challenging behaviours effectively.

## Areas for improvement

43. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in Hounslow the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

**Immediately:**

- there are no recommendations that require an immediate response

**Within three months:**

- reports and care plans for looked after children and young people should be improved with recommendations documented in measurable ways within set timescales

**Within six months:**

- action should be planned and implemented to prevent looked after children and young people from being excluded from education
- action should be taken to increase the effectiveness of council members' contribution to corporate parenting.

## Outcomes for children and young people Grade 2 (Good)

44. Services to promote good health among looked after children and young people are good. Carers of looked after children are very aware of their role in promoting healthy lifestyles and formal training is included in foster carer preparation and development opportunities. A highly effective, dedicated team of professionals addresses all aspects of health need. In excess of 90% of looked after children and young people receive annual health checks and dental examinations. Imaginative ways to offer services to older young people have been developed, such as the looked after children nurse being based in a very popular resource centre as opposed to a clinical setting, and these have contributed to the comparatively high take up.

45. Newly arrived asylum-seeking young people receive sensitive support from health professionals and great emphasis is placed on ensuring that they receive the necessary immunisations. Access to therapy services, such as speech and language, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, for all looked after children and care leavers is good and young people who are identified as needing emotional or behavioural assistance receive equally good support from dedicated specialists within the child and adolescent mental health team. The 'strengths and difficulties questionnaire' that has been used with looked after children and young people has proven effective in identifying mental health needs and in planning interventions where necessary. There is good access to timely and individually focused sexual health, drugs and alcohol services and good evidence that effective targeting is impacting successfully in reducing teenage pregnancy among the looked after children cohort. Health plans are seen as essential elements in the stages of transitions and every effort is made to ensure that an up to date plan is available.

46. Children and young people who are looked after benefit well from good quality safeguarding arrangements. They are actively promoted through the commissioning and procurement processes and kept under constant review through social worker visits and by statutory reviews, part of which enables individual children to speak with the chairperson and make significant contributions to the process. Over 90% of looked after young people have directly contributed to their reviews in the last year. Over 80% of the looked after young people who were surveyed reported that they felt very safe and that they had confidence that they could express their concerns in a number of different ways if they needed to. Good awareness of the complaints procedure, increased placement stability, better matching of placement to need, increased placement choice and an effective local authority designated officer service to deal with allegations against staff are all effective safeguarding features.

47. Education and support for all looked after children, including those placed out of borough, are well targeted to need irrespective of where they are placed and the impact of services in enabling children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good. Education is a priority area and looked after children and young people benefit from a dedicated service, the Looked After Children Education Service, which oversees and actively promotes progress, providing additional support such as personal tutoring when necessary. A high proportion of looked after children and young people attend good or better schools and aspirations for their success are appropriately high and latest data confirm a rising trend in standards. Careful tracking of individual pupil's progress, supported by up to date and reviewed personal education plans, has enabled good progress to be made over time from their starting points. Outcomes for looked after children at key stages 2 and 4 improved in 2009 and when compared to similar pupil cohorts performance is good. Performance of looked after children achieving 5A*–Cs increased sharply by 11% in 2009 compared to a borough wide increase of 8% thereby achieving a closing of the gap.

48. The school attendance of looked after children and young people is in line with national averages and there is effective tracking of those who are persistent absentees by the education welfare service. One looked after young person was permanently excluded in the last year, although more have been excluded for fixed terms. These issues are being addressed strategically, with improved provision being put in place for those with emotional and behavioural disorders, but at this stage it is too early to measure impact.

49. Opportunities for looked after children to make a positive contribution are good. They have access to a range of support to enable them to prepare for key decisions in their life. In response to the inspection survey, over 80% reported high degrees of satisfaction with the support they received in making contributions and a slightly greater number believed that their views were always taken into account. Every respondent confirmed that their care plans were appropriate and were being implemented in full and those interviewed echoed these findings. Looked after children, through their work on the corporate parenting panel and the developing children in care panel, are

contributing to understandings of quality service. In addition, service users and their carers are increasingly consulted, particularly in new service developments, about quality of the services they receive.

50. Looked after children contribute to training, most notably through the 'total respect' training initiative, and a group recently produced a valuable training CD about rights and responsibilities. Enrichment activities are widely available and Connexions personal advisors and staff in extended services are central to a range of these initiatives. Outstanding work with looked after young people who are at risk of offending has produced very good outcomes, with only 2% receiving a final warning or a conviction compared to 9.5% nationally.

51. The impact of services in enabling looked after children and young people and care leavers to achieve economic well-being is good. Improving numbers of looked after young people and care leavers are in education, employment and training and a number of initiatives are in place to support young people in making choices, such as the well organised 'i-Connect' event which gave young people the chance to explore opportunities. Those who are not in education, employment or training are receiving very good personal support from Connexions which has advisors located in the leaving care team to provide a dedicated service to those who need additional help such as counselling. Effective liaison with adult community education ensures that those who need additional skills in numeracy and literacy can gain ready access to classes. Good use of work placements alongside personal support has helped to prepare young people for entry into education, employment and training and currently the whereabouts of a comparatively small number of looked after young people or care leavers are unknown and few are not in education, employment or training. A significant number of young people (24) have progressed to university and this cohort includes a number of determined and motivated former asylum-seeking children who have benefited from the support and encouragement of their Connexions personal advisors and the 'Aim Higher' programme.

*These are the grades for the quality of outcomes for looked after children and care leavers*

| | |
|---|---|
| Being healthy | 2 |
| Staying safe | 2 |
| Enjoying and achieving | 2 |
| Making a positive contribution | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Achieving economic wellbeing | 2 |

## The quality of provision Grade 2 (Good)

52. The number of looked after children (currently 342) has remained proportionately constant in the face of a significantly changing profile of the child population, which has expanded considerably as a result of a 34% increase in the birth rate since 2001 and significant numbers of children and young people arriving in the borough from overseas. The council and its partners are very aware of the implications of the rapid demographic changes they are experiencing and are factoring these into current and future planning.

53. Almost 90% of looked after children and young people are now placed in foster care and integrated service provision. This, together with improved commissioning and procurement practice, has resulted in good outcomes in relation to health, education and in significantly improved and good levels of placement stability. Placement stability is supported by highly skilled direct work such as that provided by the child and adolescent mental health service and the early intervention team. Constant attention to meeting identified needs of young people has resulted in preferred providers of care services being identified and monitored closely through quality assurance and case management processes to ensure that good outcomes are achieved. Looked after children are significantly involved and their confidence in the council's good quality assessment processes and planning and review mechanisms has provided high levels of reassurance that placement providers are attuned to meeting their individual needs. These are set out in adequate care plans which are thorough although, until recently, infrequently documented in a sufficiently clear style. Case recording, although improving, remains adequate overall although each file shows evidence of regular and focused supervision and more recently, a sharper focus on the quality of the recording.

54. Looked after children and young people benefit from a range of good opportunities to participate in constructive leisure activities. For example the Youth Empowerment Service offers a variety of educational, cultural, leisure and social events. The commitment of children and young people is enhanced by valuable opportunities to become involved in the bidding and development processes which underpin the activities. The multi agency health group has encouraged good levels of take up in programmes designed to improve young people's involvement in physical activity.

55. Looked after children and young people are aware about how to complain, although the number of complaints is low and even fewer required the formal stages to be invoked. Those interviewed reported that the professionals with

whom they were working dealt satisfactorily with concerns at an early stage, which meant that there was rarely a need to proceed further. The evidence of looked after children who were surveyed as part of this inspection endorsed these views.

56. Safeguarding arrangements are established across the partnership and there is a high level of awareness of the need for vigilance in placement arrangements which are built into all aspects of the commissioning and reviewing processes. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has been effective and efficient in dealing with referred cases in which a complaint has been made about a member of staff working with children. There is clear evidence that the wider partnership is fully conversant with the LADO's role and responsibilities.

57. Transition arrangements are much improved with some outstanding evidence of children and young people, including some with significant learning difficulties and disabilities, being prepared for placement transitions, including a return home. The CAF and children in need plans are used to support children and young people in returning to their communities. All transition arrangements are overseen by managers through regular and focused supervision. Adult services are involved appropriately and early in the process when young people are assessed as being likely to be in continuing need of services into adulthood.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

| | |
|---|---|
| Service responsiveness including complaints | 2 |
| Assessment and direct work with children | 2 |
| Case planning, reviews and recording | 3 |

## Leadership and management Grade 2 (Good)

58. Leadership and management of services for looked after children and young people are good. The area has clear corporate parenting strategies and, while aspects of councillor's contributions are under-developed, there is shared ambition to improve outcomes for young people. For example, strong leadership from the council and partners ensured good educational progress and achievement, through the setting and achievement of challenging targets for improvement. Good health outcomes are also achieved by engaging young

people in imaginative ways and in locations where they could make best use of the services on offer.

59. Rigorous performance management and workforce development ensure that targets are stretching and are met well in most cases. All levels of the service are appropriately engaged in performance management, resulting in support being targeted specifically at areas that need improvement or development. The recruitment and training of additional foster carers and improved access to therapeutic services are notable examples which have helped secure improved placement stability.

60. User engagement is good. Looked after children and young people are largely engaged in their reviews and feel that they are influential in affecting outcomes. All agencies, including those in the voluntary sector, have been imaginative in seeking effective ways of securing relationships with young people who might otherwise have some difficulty in accessing services. Significant and good attention has been paid to considering where to locate professionals and how best to deliver services to maximum effect.

61. Partnership working is well established at all levels of the service. Strategic planning through the Children's Strategic Partnership Board has been a feature and has involved a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector partners. At a practice level, and in order to support and improve outcomes for looked after children and young people, a range of services such as the youth offending service, Connexions and looked after children health and education teams, work effectively in partnership to deliver good outcomes.

62. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Effective action has been taken to promote opportunity and to eradicate inequality in the services and outcomes for the looked after children and care leaver cohorts. Placement choice has been created by specific recruitment of foster carers and residential placements to meet need. This action has included increasing the number of foster carers from minority ethnic populations so that placement choice and matching capability is increased. Education support and rigorous planning and review have enabled significant educational progress and attainment with strong evidence that some of the most hard to reach groups, such as African boys, have benefited significantly. Health inequalities are being effectively addressed by a range of imaginative methods and through the provision of a range of services such as the immunisation programme for asylum-seeking young people.

63. The contribution of partners to achieving value for money is good. The council's children's social care service and the PCT have been effective in managing to deliver a range of significant savings while effectively leaving front line services in place. For example, there has been improvement in commissioning and procurement and savings have been achieved while improving service quality and expanding choice of placement. As a result the service is lean and effective. The social care market has been developed to

respond to assessed and prioritised need and clear decisions to achieve a balance between cost and quality are evident in cases where expensive and scarce resources are being considered for children and young people with highly complex needs.

64. The effectiveness of services in promoting safeguarding is good. The safeguarding needs of all looked after children are identified and responded to effectively and 84% of looked after children who responded to the survey reported that they felt safe and none reported feeling unsafe or fairly unsafe. Almost all safeguarding provision in service and setting inspections have been judged good or better and where further improvement has been identified action plans have been rigorously implemented and monitored.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

| | |
|---|---|
| Ambition and prioritisation | 2 |
| Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development | 2 |
| User engagement | 2 |
| Partnerships | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 1 |
| Value for money | 2 |

# Record of main findings: London Borough of Hounslow

| **Safeguarding services** | |
|---|---|
| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Capacity for improvement | Good |
| **Outcomes for children and young people** | |
| Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe | Good |
| Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe | Good |
| **Quality of provision** | Good |
| Service responsiveness including complaints | Good |
| Assessment and direct work with children and families | Good |
| Case planning, review and recording | Adequate |
| **Leadership and management** | Good |
| Ambition and prioritisation | Good |
| Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development | Good |
| User engagement | Good |
| Partnerships | Good |
| Equality and diversity | Outstanding |
| Value for money | Good |

| **Services for looked after children** | |
|---|---|
| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Capacity for improvement | Good |
| **Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers** | |
| Being healthy | Good |
| Staying safe | Good |
| Enjoying and achieving | Good |
| Making a positive contribution | Good |
| Economic well-being | Good |
| **Quality of provision** | Good |
| Service responsiveness | Good |
| Assessment and direct work with children | Good |
| Case planning, review and recording | Adequate |
| **Leadership and management** | Good |
| Ambition and prioritisation | Good |
| Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development | Good |
| User engagement | Good |
| Partnerships | Good |
| Equality and diversity | Outstanding |
| Value for money | Good |