

<b><u>MEETING</u></b> <b>CHILDREN, EDUCATION &amp; SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE</b>
<b><u>DATE AND TIME</u></b> <b>MONDAY 1ST JULY, 2019</b> <b>AT 7.00 PM</b>
<b><u>VENUE</u></b> <b>HENDON TOWN HALL, THE BURROUGHS, LONDON NW4 4BQ</b>

Dear Councillors,

Please find enclosed additional papers relating to the following items for the above mentioned meeting which were not available at the time of collation of the agenda.

Item No	Title of Report	Pages
7.	OFSTED REPORT	3 - 26

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	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHILDREN, EDUCATION and SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1 July 2019</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>Update report on the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Social Care Services – May 2019</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>Chairman of the Committee, Councillor David Longstaff</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p><b>Appendix 1: Inspection of children’s services summary letter</b>  <b>Appendix 2: Inspection of children’s social care services report</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Officer Contact Details</b></p>	<p>Chris Munday          Executive Director for Children and Young People  <a href="mailto:Chris.Munday@barnet.gov.uk">Chris.Munday@barnet.gov.uk</a></p>

### Summary

Children's services in Barnet were judged by OFSTED to be inadequate when OFSTED undertook a Single Inspection Framework (SIF) during April and May 2017. The Council fully accepted the findings of the report and worked collectively with the partnership to drive the improvements needed to transform social care services for children, young people and their families from inadequate to good rapidly.

In response to the recommendations and areas for improvement identified by OFSTED, the Barnet Children Services Improvement Action Plan was developed and a final version presented to Committee in November 2017.

Ofsted undertook an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Social Care Services (ILACS) in Barnet between 13 May and 24 May 2019. OFSTED judged Barnet to be good across all inspection domains. This report provides an update on the inspection findings and recommendations.

### Recommendations

**1. To consider and note the inspection findings as set out within Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.**

**2. To refer the report to Full Council for consideration.**

- 1.1 Children's services in Barnet were judged by OFSTED to be inadequate when OFSTED undertook a Single Inspection Framework (SIF) of these services in April and May 2017.
- 1.2 The Council fully accepted the findings of the report and worked collectively with the partnership to drive the improvements needed to transform social care services for children, young people and their families from inadequate to good rapidly.
- 1.3 Under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework, local authorities judged as inadequate are subject to ongoing monitoring activity from OFSTED; in Barnet, this included an action planning visit, quarterly monitoring visits, and a full ILACS inspection.
- 1.4 A standard ILACS took place from 13 May to 24 May 2019. Inspectors found the service to be 'good' across the four inspection domains:

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

1.5 OFSTED informed the local authority of the inspection findings and published their report on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. This also means that all Department of Education Directions will also cease from the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. The full inspection report can be found in Appendix 1. A young person's summary is published as Appendix 2.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 Members are asked to consider and note the inspection findings to ensure scrutiny by elected members and ensure the effectiveness of the local authority in protecting and caring for children and young people as a corporate parent.

2.2 Members are asked to refer to report to Full Council.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

3.1 Not applicable.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

4.1 Not applicable.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

5.1.1 The delivery of good services to children and families is a key mechanism through which Barnet Council and its partners will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision to be the most family friendly borough in London by 2020.

5.1.2 This supports the following Council's corporate priorities as expressed through the Corporate Plan for 2019-2024 which sets out the vision and strategy for the next five years based on the core principles of fairness, responsibility and opportunity, to make sure Barnet;

- Is a pleasant, well maintained borough that we protect and invest in;
- Residents live happy, healthy, independent lives with the most vulnerable protected;
- Has safe and strong communities where people get along well.

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 5.2.1 Policy and Resources Committee of June 2017 agreed to invest an additional £5.7m in Family Services, some of which was invested to improve practice to ensure improvements are made which result in better outcomes for children, young people and families. The detailed breakdown of this additional £5.7 million is provided in item 7, CELS agenda 18 September 2017.
- 5.2.2 Medium Term Financial Savings (MTFS) for 2018 - 2020 were reviewed in light of the Family Services improvement journey to consider achievability. The original CES Committee target for 2018/19 – 2019/20 was £8.303m was revised to £4.409m in the 2018/19 Policy & Resource Committee Business Planning Report.

### **5.3 Social Value**

- 5.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

### **5.4 Legal and Constitutional References**

- 5.4.1 Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, if this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing services appropriate to the child's needs. They also have a duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing services appropriate to the child's needs, provided this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare. They should do this in partnership with parents, in a way that is sensitive to the child's race, religion, culture and language and that, where practicable, takes account of the child's wishes and feelings.
- 5.4.2 Part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 provides the statutory framework for OFSTED inspections. Section 136 and 137 provide the power for OFSTED to inspect on behalf of the Secretary of State and requires the Chief Inspector to produce a report following such an inspection. OFSTED will have monitoring visits on a regular basis in local authorities found to be inadequate. A new OFSTED framework has been in place from January 2018, however monitoring visits are still undertaken for authorities found to be inadequate. In addition to OFSTED's statutory responsibilities, the Secretary of State has the power to direct local authorities. This power of direction includes the power to impose a commissioner, direct the local authority to work with improvement partners and direct alternative delivery options. Subsequent directions can be given if the services are not found to be adequate.
- 5.4.3 Article 7 of the council's constitution states that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee has the responsibility for all matters relating to children, schools and education. In addition to this, the committee has responsibility for overseeing the support for young people in care and enhancing the council's corporate parenting role.

## **5.5 Risk Management**

### **Children's Services Improvement Action Plan**

- 5.5.1 The nature of services provided to children and families by Family Services manage significant levels of risk. An inappropriate response or poor decision-making around a case could lead to a significant children's safeguarding incident resulting in significant harm. Good quality early intervention and social care services reduce the likelihood of children suffering harm and increase the likelihood of children developing into successful adults and achieving and succeeding. The implementation of the Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan based on inspection findings and recommendations reduce this risk and drive forward improvements towards good quality services.

## **5.6 Equalities and Diversity**

- 5.6.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public-Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
  - advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
  - foster good relations between people from different groups
- 5.6.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services
- 5.6.3 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or belief, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status and sexual orientation. Barnet has a diverse population of children and young people. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 52%, compared with 30% in the country. The percentages of children and young people from minority ethnic groups who receive statutory social care services account for 61% of Children in Need cases, 56% of child protection cases and 60% of all Children in Care. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language across primary schools is 44% (the national average is 18%). The trends in the ethnic, age and gender identity of Barnet's looked after children compared to the published population statistics for England can be seen in the children looked after (CLA) graph below. The snapshot is the CLA population as at February 2019.

## Comparing CLA demographics

CLA figures compared to published population statistics

### Ethnicity

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2017			Eng 2017		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
White	40	53	lower -25%	42	53	lower -20%	75	75	no dif 0%
Mixed	20	11	higher 87%	17	11	higher 61%	9	6	higher 56%
Asian	6	13	lower -56%	12	13	lower -12%	5	11	lower -58%
Black	18	12	higher 56%	18	12	higher 54%	7	6	higher 25%
Other	16	12	higher 38%	x	12		3	2	higher 44%

### Age

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2017			Eng 2017		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
Under 1	4	6	lower -26%	4	6	lower -25%	5	6	lower -5%
1 to 4	10	23	lower -57%	7	23	lower -70%	13	23	lower -45%
5 to 9	9	30	lower -69%	11	30	lower -63%	19	29	lower -34%
10 to 15	35	31	higher 13%	37	31	higher 19%	39	32	higher 24%
16-plus	41	9	higher 333%	40	9	higher 324%	23	10	higher 126%

### Gender

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2017			Eng 2017		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
Male	62	51	higher 20%	61	51	higher 19%	56	51	higher 10%
Female	38	49	lower -22%	39	49	lower -20%	44	49	lower -10%

5.6.4 Barnet also has an above average rate of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children when compared to statistical neighbours, and the statistical neighbour average. In 2018, Barnet had 66 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, compared to an average of 34 amongst statistical neighbours. The only statistical neighbour which had more was Hillingdon, a London Borough which is within a 10-mile radius of Heathrow airport.

5.6.5 Unaccompanied young people experience separation and loss from their families, and in addition to this they are also likely to have experienced further trauma, such as abuse an exploitation whilst travelling to the UK. There have been several practice and service developments to ensure the needs of this group are met, many of whom arrive in the UK without being able to speak English. In 2018,

- an education programme was commissioned from Whitefields School to induct unaccompanied young people into the UK and education system;
- an initial health assessment pathway was created that included specific processes for unaccompanied young people, to accommodate the range of checks that need to be undertaken for this group;
- a new unaccompanied asylum-seeking children specialist Personal Advisor role was created in Onwards and Upwards. The worker speaks Pashtu and Albanian – the two most common languages spoken by Barnet's unaccompanied young people – and has experience in dealing with the Home Office and dealing with tasks such as Human Rights Assessments, which has been invaluable in supporting this vulnerable group of young people;
- Practice improvements in life story work resulted in a former unaccompanied young person creating a video work as an outcome of his successful life story

work and foster placement;

- All newly arrived unaccompanied young people are now allocated to a worker in Onwards and Upwards upon arrival to reduce the number of workers and times a young person has to repeat their story.

5.6.6 In Barnet, we have a higher percentage of children in need with a recorded disability compared to the London and England rat. As at 31 March 2018, the rate of disability was as follows:

Local authority	Number of Children in need episodes at 31 March	Number of children in need episodes at 31 March with a disability recorded	Percentage of children in need episodes at 31 March with a disability recorded
England	404,710	49,770	12.3
London	72,810	9,460	13.0
Inner London	31,460	3,900	12.4
Outer London	41,350	5,560	13.4
<b>Barnet</b>	<b>2,107</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>15.0</b>

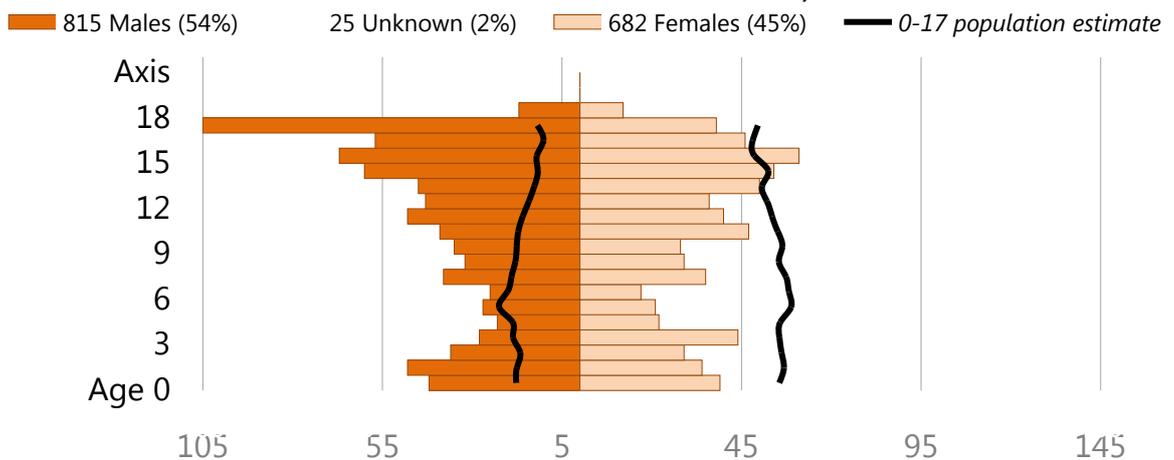
5.6.7 One key service which supports disabled children, young people and families is the 0-25 service. The service was reorganised in September 2017 and consists of a team of social workers, family support workers, direct payment workers and occupational therapists who work with young people as per the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014. The service supports a strength based model of practice that aims to build families strengths, resilience and capacity. The service intervenes and supports families earlier and throughout young people's transition to adulthood, building their capacity and resilience.

5.6.8 Since the service's introduction, and the inadequate Ofsted rating, practice has improved across children and adult cases, and there is significantly better partnership working with Adult services, SEND, Health and parents - with the aim to achieve effective co-production. There is a better understanding of safeguarding within the service which means that children with disabilities are better protected.

5.6.9 The focus for 2019 regarding support for disabled children, young people and families pertains to practice development, data and systems and support for families, such as recommissioning the Short Breaks service. These fall under the OFSTED improvement plan themes of 'enhancing practice leadership for children' and 'strengthening planning for children', which will lead to better outcomes for children, young people and families.

5.6.10 As at 20 December 2018, there are more children in need aged 14 to 18 than any other age group, as illustrated in the graph 1 below.

**Graph 1: Age/Gender of all Children in Need (1522) (including Child Protection and Looked after Children)**



5.6.11 The number and needs of adolescents has resulted in several services being invested in to ensure that emerging and existing issues are supported to prevent them becoming more serious problems; data shoes that this age group are more likely to be affected by issues such as exploitation, criminality and poor mental health. As at 30 November 2018, of 27 young people identified as known to the Youth Offending Team and vulnerable (gone missing, those with an open Child Sexual Exploitation or gang flag, and those who have been the subject of a Sexual Exploitation And Missing meeting, within a selected time period) 96% (n=26), were aged 15 to 17, one was 12 years old.

5.6.12 One of the services that has been invested in to engage vulnerable young people in this age group is the REACH Team. This team was set up in April 2017 to provide multi-agency wrap-around support to young people at high risk of criminal or sexual exploitation. Further to this the Trusted Relationships Project will be delivered in 2019 following a successful bid to the Home Office in September 2018; more details about this can be found in 2.10 to 2.19.

5.6.13 A further way in which the service is attempting to meet the specific needs of this age group, is through the provision of mental health support at Onwards and Upwards, which includes 1:1 appointments with trainee psychotherapists from Terapia which is available for care leavers in need of emotional support.

5.6.14 Some areas of social work practice in relation to inequalities and disadvantage still remain inconsistent. Learning from audits and practice week has highlighted attention to diversity and the cultural context in assessments is an area of practice in need of immediate support from management, the Practice Development Workers and targeted training. The Ofsted improvement action plan addresses the additional work which needs to be done to ensure that children’s diversity and identity needs are met; “5b(ii) Strengthen consideration of diversity in assessment so that assessments thoroughly explore and consider family history including the influence of cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs, norms and expectations”, and training is ongoing to ensure this work is embedding.

5.6.15 Additional equalities and diversity information and data in relation to service improvements that have, and continue to be made following the 2017 OFSTED

inspection, are outlined within the Self-Evaluation Framework presented at the November 2018 CES Committee. For example, a new programme of diversity training for social workers has been introduced, which has resulted in improvements in this domain of practice, as evidenced by audit grades.

## 5.7 Corporate Parenting

5.7.1 In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers' strategy *Keep on Caring* which outlined that the "... [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require *all departments* within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.'

5.7.2 The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and;
7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

5.7.3 A number of activities have been undertaken as part of the OFSTED improvement journey and to ensure that Barnet has due regard to the Principles and improves on the delivery of corporate parenting to its children in care and care leavers. This includes:

- A Children in Care survey relaunch in December 2018 resulted in a 60.9% increase in responses from children and young people when compared to the previous survey. Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel will use a more in-depth analysis of the results, alongside the results of the other work with young people over the last 12 months to agree what will happen as a result of the messages from the survey.
- Barnet have committed to supporting children and young people to achieve their best in childhood, adolescence and adulthood within the Corporate Parenting Pledge for children in care and care leavers, as approved by full council on 29 January 2016.

- Learning and development for elected members and senior officers has and will continue to be delivered, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of their duties and responsibilities to children and care and care leavers and ways in which the Principles can be embedded and sufficient challenge provided regarding work and decisions of the council. The last training session for members was delivered on 31 May 2018.
- Improved our Mental Health offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers, in partnership with the Barnet Integrated Clinical Service and Terapia.
- To ensure that Barnet has due regard to the Principles and improves on the delivery of corporate parenting to children in care and care leavers in Barnet, the administering of council tax relief was approved at Full Council on 31 July 2018 and backdated to April 2018 when implemented in September 2018. This scheme helps care experienced young people have a more successful transition to independence, through the provision of guaranteed relief in their first two years of independent living.

Young people, key services and senior officers developed the policy, which was amended based on feedback received from the care leavers that responded to the public consultation.

The introduction of the care leavers council tax policy aims to help improve the emotional and physical health of care experienced young people and contribute to the achievement of the best outcomes for this cohort.

- A Care Leaver Participation Coordinator has been recruited to lead on a targeted participation project which seeks to improve the education, employment and training (EET) outcomes of Barnet's Care Leavers. The Coordinator's role includes working with key stakeholders to develop and implement an appropriate and accessible EET Pathway for Barnet Care Leavers, action EET related tasks within the Corporate Parenting Plan and work with staff and care leavers to increase skills and opportunities available to care leavers. This project has been funded by the Council's Chief Executive until March 2021.
- We ensure elected members, senior officers and partners can monitor and challenge the performance of the council and its partner agencies pertaining to consideration of the Principles and outcomes for children in care and care leavers through the appropriate channels. This includes the Children, Education, and Safeguarding Committee (bi-monthly), Corporate Parenting Advisory (quarterly) Panel and Corporate Parenting Officers' Group (monthly).

## **5.8 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.8.1 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is central to social work practice and service improvement across the Safeguarding Partnership. A service user experience strategy has been developed and was launched on 19th February 2018. The strategy ensures that how we work with children and young people is child centred,

that we know, understand and can capture the lived experience of children and feed lessons learnt into service improvement. We have nominated Voice of the child champions across partner agencies and within Family Services to promote and lead on the Service User Engagement agenda within their respective areas.

- 5.8.2 Our Voice of the Child Strategy Group enables the wider engagement of children and young people in service design and commissioning of provision across the partnership. This includes youth forums such as Barnet Youth Board and Youth Assembly, the SEN forum (to co-design services) and Children in Care Council (to improve the support children in care receive). The team have been working closely with UNICEF UK to deliver the Child Friendly Communities and Cities initiative. This is a global programme that aims to advance children's rights and well-being at the local level. More recently the team have had a change in staff with a newly appointed Voice of the Child Coordinator and Child's Rights Lead. The team are reviewing the current Youth Voice Offer to develop a structured action plan to focus on increasing reach and impact for children and young people in Barnet.

## **5.9 Insight**

- 5.9.1 Insight data will continue to be regularly collected and used in monitoring the progress and impact of Barnet's Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and to shape ongoing improvement activity.

## **6 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1 Single 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 Board report, OFSTED, 7 July 2017

[https://reports.OFSTED.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local\\_authority\\_reports/barnet/051\\_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf](https://reports.OFSTED.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/barnet/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf)

- 6.2 Barnet's Corporate Parenting Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers (2016)

[https://www.barnet.gov.uk/dam/jcr:c33f12a5-86d9-4215-9c89-a8c82675fba4/Pledge%20for%20Children%20in%20Care%202016%20\(digital\).pdf](https://www.barnet.gov.uk/dam/jcr:c33f12a5-86d9-4215-9c89-a8c82675fba4/Pledge%20for%20Children%20in%20Care%202016%20(digital).pdf)

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1 July 2019

Mr Chris Munday  
Executive Director for Children and Young People  
London Borough of Barnet

To the children and young people in the London Borough of Barnet

### **Inspection of children's services**

In May 2019, Ofsted inspectors visited your area. They considered the experiences of children and young people when they need help, protection or care given to them by workers at the local authority. They also looked at what leaders in the local authority do, to make these services better.

We have asked the workers at the local authority to share this letter with you. It tells you the main things that inspectors found. There is a more detailed report on our website that you can read if you want to.

### **What grades did inspectors give the local authority?**

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

## **What did the inspectors find?**

- We found that services for children and young people in Barnet have improved a lot since the last inspection in 2017, and all services are now good. Senior managers are working well with the police, health staff and other agencies to keep improving the way that children and their families get the support and help that they need, when they need it.
- Social workers work hard to make sure that children and young people are safe. They visit children regularly and get to know them well. This helps them to decide what type of support will be most helpful. There are plenty of different services available that give good support to children and their families to help them to overcome their difficulties.
- Good support is provided to help to keep children and young people safe when they have been at risk of sexual exploitation or going missing, or if they have been involved with gangs, although plans about how to make things better for children are not always clear. It is important that everybody understands what has to change and what they are expected to do.
- Social workers and managers make the right decisions about which children need protection, and when children are not able to live at home with their families. They find them a good place to live and make sure that children keep in contact with people who are important to them, as long as this is safe. Most children stay with their carers for a long time and have the help that they need to make sure that they are healthy and benefit from their education.
- Children with a plan for adoption are placed without delay and receive plenty of help to settle with their new family. Brothers and sisters are placed together as much as possible.
- Children's views are very important to workers and managers, who make sure that their opinions are taken into account in their plans or when changes are made to services for them.
- Young people leaving care receive a good service. Staff keep in touch with them and provide support to help them to keep healthy and to be happy with where they live, and in education, training or a job. There is good support for those young people who choose to go to college or university, and they have practical and financial support to help them to succeed.

With best wishes

Andy Whippey  
Lead Inspector

# London Borough of Barnet

## Inspection of children's social care services

**Inspection dates: 13 May to 24 May 2019**

**Lead inspector: Andy Whippey**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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

Services for children in Barnet are good, and much improved from the services that were found to be inadequate in 2017. Leaders and managers have made purposeful progress, at pace, to establish a child-focused service that is delivering good outcomes. The executive director and his team, together with strong corporate support, have ensured a focus on continuous improvement. This is underpinned by a clear oversight of practice and comprehensive knowledge of the service.

Strong partnerships have led to an effective and well-integrated early help service. Children who need help and protection now receive help and support that is timely and of good quality. Assessments and plans show careful consideration of the views of children and their families.

Children in care receive a good service from workers who know them well. Carers provide stable homes and are supportive and ambitious for the 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 young people to improve outcomes, which they do with care and sensitivity.

## What needs to improve

- The incorporation of actions from the vulnerable adolescents at risk panel (VARP) and exploitation strategy meetings into child in need and child protection plans.
- The updating of assessments of need when circumstances change for children in care.
- The incorporation of outcomes from multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) into child in need and child protection plans.
- The promotion of advocacy support for children in care.

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

1. Children and their families benefit from a good early help offer and have access to a broad range of preventive and targeted services. Early help services are integrated into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), resulting in timely decisions to identify the most appropriate help to meet children's needs. Partnership working across the early help hubs is strong, with a clear focus on considering the needs of children and their families. Parents and carers are very positive about the impact of services on the well-being of them and their children. While the views of children and families are well considered in early help assessments, the analysis of risk is less well articulated in a small number of cases.
2. Partners have a good understanding of thresholds when making referrals. Thresholds are applied consistently for children in need of help and protection. The 'front door' and the MASH provide a timely and effective response to contacts by professionals and members of the public. Contacts in the MASH are responded to quickly, according to the level of need and risk in the presenting information. Consent is routinely sought, or overridden when appropriate, and managers record a clear rationale for their decisions. When concerns for children escalate, multi-agency responses to information requests are managed effectively to ensure that work can be progressed in a timely way. For the majority of cases, partner information is thorough and contributes to the assessment of children's needs.
3. Children receive appropriate support and interventions from the out-of-hours emergency duty team, which is shared with another borough. Communication and handover arrangements with the MASH work well, ensuring an effective response to children and their families.
4. Timely strategy discussions take place when children's needs escalate. Discussions are child-focused, with good consideration of historical factors,

and decision-making is clear and appropriate. Strategy meetings are held routinely when young people are missing or are at risk of exploitation.

5. Staff take effective action to reduce risks to children who are considered to be highly vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, including children missing from home, school or care. Workers are tenacious in trying to engage young people who have been missing, making good use of return home interviews. Social workers understand the complexity of risks to children and this is given good consideration in multi-agency meetings and risk assessments. The monthly VARP enables good consideration of high-risk individual young people, to better understand the risks and protective factors. Disruptive measures to reduce risks of sexual and other forms of exploitation are clearly identified. The use of the sexual exploitation and missing (SEAM) tool helps to identify specific risks and vulnerabilities. However, some young people do not have an integrated plan that sufficiently incorporates all actions from SEAM and VARP in order to provide a comprehensive overview of risk that would enable clear oversight and evaluation of progress.
6. The vast majority of assessments are timely, comprehensive and of good quality. Children's and family's views, often gathered over a number of visits, are well evidenced and inform assessment outcomes. Assessments provide succinct evidence of risks to children and clear analysis. They demonstrate a good balance of understanding and analysis and are focused on parents' capacity to meet the needs of children. Workers make good use of chronologies and family history and show sensitive consideration of culture and ethnicity in their assessments, which results in a good understanding of individual children's needs.
7. Well-established and flexible services provide effective and sustained interventions for children and adults at risk from domestic abuse. Senior managers recognise that there is more to do to ensure that protective actions agreed at MARAC meetings are incorporated into children's plans to ensure a clear and integrated plan to help to protect children.
8. Most child protection and child in need plans are realistic and identify clear desired outcomes, making it easy for parents and children to understand any concerns. Plans are increasingly child focused, although this is not yet consistent across the whole service.
9. Records of core groups and child in need planning meetings are consistently evident on children's files, although not all meetings take place within identified timescales, particularly child in need meetings. Meetings mostly include good-quality and up-to-date information about children and their families and consider progress against plans. Family members are helpfully facilitated to attend, supported by sensitive and proactive use of interpreters when required.

10. Social workers know their children well. They visit children very regularly and see them alone. Increasing use is made of purposeful, individual work to help to understand children's experiences and to inform planning. In a minority of cases, records are not completed in a timely manner, which results in gaps in information on children's records.
11. Disabled children benefit from strong service provision. Workers in the disability service know their children and families well and demonstrate a good understanding of their complex needs. Support and short breaks packages are comprehensive. Transition planning is timely. Plans for children are thorough, progress is monitored, and concerns are escalated appropriately when new or emerging risks are identified.
12. The number of children who are electively home educated has increased over the last two years. Senior managers have taken appropriate steps to identify children not receiving a suitable education, and liaise with partners when additional needs, including safeguarding concerns, are identified. Staff are tenacious in tracking any children missing education and make appropriate checks to establish their whereabouts.
13. Although the number of children and young people known to be at risk of radicalisation is relatively low, a clear process helps to ensure that they are protected.
14. Children living in private fostering arrangements are safeguarded effectively. They are visited regularly and are seen alone. Assessments of need are up to date, and children are given the opportunity to talk about any concerns or worries they may have about living away from their families.
15. Allegations against professionals are 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.
16. Strong partnerships and a clear homelessness protocol between Barnet housing and children's social care help to support 16- and 17-year-old young people in need of help and accommodation. Joint assessments and co-location of housing, early help and MASH workers support family mediation and shared communication about young people's risks and current circumstances that lead to appropriate responses to meet their needs.

## **The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: Good**

17. The quality of services for children in care has improved since the inspection in 2017. Social workers and managers are aspirational for the children in their care and demonstrate a determination to improve children's experiences and outcomes.

18. When children come into care, they receive effective and sensitive intervention. This includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who receive a strong, supportive and quick response to meet their needs.
19. When risks increase and children are no longer able to live safely at home, statutory powers are used appropriately to safeguard and protect them. The pre-proceedings phase of the Public Law Outline is used well, and realistic timescales are set for parents to demonstrate progress. Plans are regularly reviewed to avoid drift. Effective support is in place, which reduces risk for children when parents are engaging well, but decisive action is taken when there is a failure to improve within a child's timescales. Thresholds for care proceedings are applied correctly, assessments and statements are mostly of good quality and plans are clear.
20. In most cases, children's needs for permanence are considered at the earliest opportunity. Whenever possible, children are looked after within their extended families. Assessments of connected persons are timely and comprehensive, identifying how the longer-term needs of children will be met. Support packages are creative and effective. Children who return home from care receive a good level of structured support for as long as they need it, and they only return home when it is appropriate and safe for them to do so.
21. Adoption is routinely considered, including 'foster to adopt' for those children unable to live with their birth or extended families. Recruitment processes for adopters are thorough and the assessment, training and support for adopters are sound. Good quality assessments inform considered decisions about whether brothers or sisters should live together. Carefully considered 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. Most adoptions are completed without unnecessary delay.
22. Assessments for children placed with family members under special guardianship arrangements are timely and comprehensively explore the motivation and ability of carers to meet the needs of children until maturity. Support packages are tailored to the individual needs of carers and children.
23. Social workers know their children well and genuinely care about them. Children are seen regularly, routinely alone and the direct work undertaken with them is clearly taken into account in plans. Children are actively encouraged to take part in their reviews, although the number of children accessing advocacy is low and more needs to be done to promote the service.
24. The majority of children's care plans are clear, focused on the key areas of need for children and include realistic actions and timescales. However, updated assessments of need to inform plans for children with complex needs or when their circumstances have significantly changed are not routinely

undertaken, limiting the effectiveness of the plan. Children's needs for contact with family members and others important to them are well considered. In most cases, oversight of children's progress by independent reviewing officers (IROs) is good and is recorded in children's records. Statutory reviews are held regularly, with increasing use of mid-point reviews. IROs are appropriately challenging and escalate concerns when necessary, which has resulted in better planning for children.

25. Social workers recognise and respond well to children in care who are vulnerable to exploitation. This includes identifying interdependencies of risks from sexual exploitation, missing from care, radicalisation and criminal exploitation. Strategy meetings result in appropriate plans that help to reduce risk and protect children.
26. Children's physical and emotional health needs are well understood and met. Health assessments are up to date and timely and address known health histories. They identify all health needs and are actively followed up to ensure that these needs are met. Strengths and difficulties questionnaires inform assessments of children's emotional health, with additional support available from relevant clinicians and in-house specialists to enable carers to care for children with complex needs and histories.
27. The virtual school provides effective support for the progress and attainment of children in care. The virtual school team has a sound understanding of the progress that children are making. As a result of effective support, many make good progress from their starting points. Personal education plans are mostly of good quality; they are reviewed termly and clearly identify the support that children need. Interventions are tailored to children's needs and support their progress well.
28. Children receive good-quality care from their foster carers. Most in-house foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved within appropriate timescales. Assessments are thorough and demonstrate consideration of the impact of fostering on the whole family. Foster carers benefit from a wide range of support and training opportunities, and carers report being well supported.
29. A small number of children have experienced too many placement moves before a long-term match with suitable carers is made. Increasing use is made of early placement stability meetings when there is a danger of disruption, with specific support given to both carers and children. This is beginning to have a positive impact.
30. Children have access to a range of leisure opportunities, through after-school activities, sport and music, and they are able to have sleepovers with their friends where appropriate. Foster carers exercise their delegated authority effectively in the best interests of children.

31. Very few children and young people have support from an independent visitor. The service has been recommissioned recently, with an increased recruitment target, but this is yet to have an impact.
32. Children in care placed outside of the local authority are well supported and have appropriate access to relevant health and education provision. If children are placed out of borough, this is often in response to a safeguarding or complex need, and active consideration is given to children returning to a local placement when this is consistent with their needs. Appropriate notifications are made to host authorities.
33. Most care leavers receive a positive level of support. The quality of pathway plans is variable and not all pathway plans are reviewed when young people's circumstances significantly change. Better pathway plans were seen using the recently launched 'All about me' format, which contains greater clarity about young people's views and aspirations and a more thorough assessment of their circumstances.
34. Care leavers are in suitable 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. Senior managers have been proactive in developing opportunities for care leavers through the creation of a number of apprenticeships. Personal advisers are proactive and genuinely interested in the young people, who value the support that they receive.
35. The multi-agency high-risk case forum for care leavers is well supported by partner agencies and explores creative ways to engage vulnerable young people with multi-agency services. Clear actions are agreed for each young person, with a timescale for review; this helps to ensure that the risks are understood and appropriate plans to support young people are put in place.
36. Care leavers receive copies of their health histories. However, senior managers recognise that there is more work to do in conjunction with young people to ensure that these documents contain all the relevant information for the young people to make informed decisions about their health.

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

37. Leaders and managers have made significant progress in improving the quality of children's services since the previous inspection in 2017. Their determination to strive constantly for improvement and their openness to learning have driven change at pace. This has been supported by the positive

input of the improvement board. Strong and effective leadership at a political level and throughout the council has prioritised support and care for children and young people. This has led to significant and tangible improvements in the quality of social work practice and the services that children and young people experience. Time and energy have been invested in ensuring that political leaders and members understand the importance of children's social care. This deeper understanding has enabled more robust scrutiny and challenge.

38. Senior managers know the quality of frontline practice well, including the strengths and areas requiring further improvement. This knowledge is gained through relevant performance information and enhanced by shadowing workers, observing practice, chairing panels and engaging directly with young people. Sound decisions ensure that children receive the right level of support when they first need it. The local authority's stated ethos and belief that children's needs are best met at the earliest opportunity and, whenever possible, within their wider family, are evidenced by its firm commitment to funding early help provision and a raft of edge of care provision.
39. Senior leaders have developed mature relationships with partner agencies, supported by robust oversight by the Barnet Safeguarding Children Board and its sub groups. A wide range of partners, including the police and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), all commented positively to inspectors on the level of progress made to further safeguard children.
40. Senior managers have a detailed knowledge of their services and the local community. The challenges in placement sufficiency, based on a clear analysis of need, are well known and reflected in the sufficiency strategy. Managers recognise the necessity for a more diverse range of carers to meet the needs of the profile of children and young people in care in Barnet. While inspectors saw a number of young people who were appropriately placed out of authority to address safeguarding concerns, senior managers recognise the need for more local provision to reduce the number of children placed out of borough or at a distance.
41. Since the previous inspection in 2017, leaders and senior managers have embraced their role as corporate parents and have applied vigour in progressing an action plan 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. Young people's views are sought and their involvement in shaping services is sensitively facilitated.
42. There is a clear and established system of audits underpinning the quality assurance process. Audit findings are collated into quality assurance reports that highlight strengths and areas for development and next steps. Audits

have rightly had a focus on compliance in the local authority's improvement journey. More recent audits have moved to a fuller consideration of the impact of work on outcomes for children, although the approach is at an early stage and needs to be further embedded. Trends and themes from audits are used effectively to inform the training and development programme. Actions arising 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 practice.

43. Performance management systems capture a wide range of relevant data across the organisation. This data 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 performance shortfalls emerging in their area of responsibility, and to respond accordingly. The use of performance data is increasingly embedded and accessible. Improved accountability by managers at all levels means that there is analysis and challenge and helps to ensure that issues are tackled as they arise.
44. Staff have manageable caseloads and senior managers have worked hard to ensure that social workers maintain a consistent relationship with children. While supervision of frontline practice is not always consistently recorded in children's records, the majority of work with children receives effective frontline management oversight.
45. Staff are both tenacious and thoughtful in their work, showing a strong commitment to the delivery of good services to children. Inspectors saw examples where workers went the extra mile to ensure that vulnerable children are supported well in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Staff feel supported and report that managers and leaders are easily accessible and approachable. Social workers appreciate the opportunity to continually develop and progress in their careers and are supported to do so. Senior managers recognise the importance of an effective workforce strategy to ensure consistency both of management oversight and the opportunity for children to build meaningful relationships with social workers. The workforce strategy is starting to have an impact on increasing the numbers of permanent workers, which helps to ensure that children have fewer changes of social worker. Workers in their assessed and supported year in employment are allocated cases of increasing complexity, which helps to develop their confidence and competence in relationship-based social work.



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