

London Borough of Harrow

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection dates: 16 January 2017 to 9 February 2017

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

¹ Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

Executive summary

Children in Harrow receive services that are well matched to their needs, reduce risk and improve their outcomes. This is because senior leaders and elected members provide strong and effective leadership, which has a positive impact on the way that services are designed, developed and delivered. The director of children's services, divisional director and chief executive have a clear understanding of both strengths and areas for development. They make good use of performance information and learning from audits to address shortfalls and raise standards, for example in their ongoing focus on improving the functioning of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). They recognise that greater use of feedback from children is needed to strengthen audits further. The local authority's overview and scrutiny panel lacks sufficient focus on children and is not consistently effective.

Social workers see children regularly. They use good direct work to come to know them well and build relationships of trust with them. This helps to improve the outcomes that children achieve. Social workers are able to do this because they have manageable caseloads. A strong focus on, and investment in, recruiting sufficient social workers makes this possible. This is also having a positive impact on reducing both a reliance on agency staff and the staff turnover. The professional development of social workers is supported by a well-planned and resourced training offer.

When children are referred to the local authority with a presenting risk of significant harm, action is quickly taken to ensure their safety. Thresholds are well understood and consistently applied. When children's level of need is lower, the MASH does not always handle these referrals as quickly as it should. While inspectors did not see any examples of children suffering harm as a result of this, some children do experience delay in receiving further assessment and services. Child protection strategy discussions take place promptly, but do not routinely involve key agencies beyond the police and local authority. There are a number of well-established and effective targeted early-help services to support children in Harrow. However, the number of children with additional needs who could benefit from an assessment and coordinated early-help response and are receiving one are low. The local authority is aware of this. The steps that it has taken to restructure and relocate its early-help services into community hubs, such as youth centres and children's centres, are well considered, but are at too early a stage to have had an impact.

Services for children and young people who go missing and those at risk of sexual exploitation are good and improving. Help and protection is effective and well coordinated for these children and young people. There is an effective structure of both strategic and operational meetings to develop services and track performance, and to monitor and intervene in the cases of individual children. A specialist team, including a child sexual exploitation coordinator, missing person's worker and gang worker, helps to ensure a focused and joined-up service for children. This work, in common with that to tackle female genital mutilation and radicalisation, is well integrated into broader safeguarding work. Disabled children receive a good service that considers their needs and manages transitions to adult services effectively.

Assessments of children's circumstances are almost all completed to a timescale that matches the seriousness and urgency of their needs, and identifies key-risk and protective factors. However, assessments for children in need and those on child protection plans are not always updated to reflect children's current circumstances and some assessments lack sufficient analysis, for example in consideration of culture and ethnicity. This makes it more difficult to ensure that plans reflect children's current circumstances and can be used to drive and measure progress.

Decisions for children to become looked after are made quickly and in their best interests. Children only become looked after when it is absolutely necessary. When legal proceedings are needed to secure their safety, assessments and support to children and their families are good and the progress swift. When the plan is for children to return home, most do so successfully. However, a few experience delay and a lack of clarity in the delivery of services to support their return home.

Children looked after receive a good service from social workers, who have high aspirations for them. Social workers help young children to understand difficult and complicated decisions about their lives, and demonstrate a real commitment to engaging young people who have ongoing high-risk behaviours. Children participate well in their reviews, and this means that plans and decisions are rooted in their wishes and feelings. In a few cases, social workers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) need to be better prepared for reviews and make sure that agreed actions are always tracked between review meetings. The health needs of children looked after, including those living outside the borough, are generally well considered, with very timely initial and review health assessments. However, some children do not receive therapeutic or emotional health services quickly enough.

When children cannot return to their birth families, new permanent homes are found as quickly as possible. Social workers pay close attention to getting this right for older children, disabled children, children from particular ethnic groups, and those with brothers and sisters. Children needing a range of possible alternative permanent families benefit from early parallel planning, careful matching with carers or adopters and good support plans. Adoption work is very strong. Children's arrangements are secure, and placement and adoption breakdowns are rare.

A large majority of care leavers receive good support that helps them to achieve well in their education and career aspirations, and in developing the skills that they need to live independently. Many achieve well and make a successful transition to adulthood. However, for a small minority there are delays in providing the support that they need in key areas, such as their emotional well-being, education, employment and training.

Children looked after and care leavers have a good understanding of their entitlements. They also receive helpful and clear information about advocacy and the independent visitors scheme. Alongside unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, they benefit from an impressive range of creative and innovative participation and engagement opportunities and an active Children in Care Council, 'Beyond limits'.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates one short-break children's residential home. It was judged to be outstanding at its most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The last inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- The last inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since March 2014.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services and public health services.
- The chief executive has been in post since November 2014.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has been in post since December 2016.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 57,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Harrow. This is 23% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 15% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 9% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 12% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 69% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Indian and other Asian.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 66% (the national average is 20%)
 - in secondary schools is 60% (the national average is 16%).

² The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

- 87% of the school population is classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British. The top five most recorded community languages spoken in the borough are English, Gujarati, Tamil, Romanian and Arabic.

Child protection in this area

- At 31 December 2016, 1,753 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,827 at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 December 2016, 228 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 40 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 195 (34 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 March 2016, six children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a small increase from a low number at 31 March 2015.
- In the two years before inspection, three serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and two serious case reviews have been completed.
- No serious case reviews are currently ongoing.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 December 2016, 200 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 35 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 180 (32 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
 - 68 (34%) live outside the local authority area
 - 17 live in residential children's homes, all of whom live out of the authority area
 - a very small number live in residential special schools³ which are out of the authority area
 - 136 live with foster families, of whom 36% live out of the authority area
 - a very small number live with their parents in the authority area
 - 23 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the past 12 months:
 - there have been nine adoptions
 - 18 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 144 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 6% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 16 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

- 53 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation. In all cases, providers who specialise in accommodation for young people supply this accommodation, and appropriate on-site or floating support is provided.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that all children and families who need an early-help assessment and a package of support coordinated by a lead professional are able to receive these.
2. Ensure that decision making within the multi-agency safeguarding hub is consistently timely, so that all children who are the subject of a referral receive assessment and support in a timely manner.
3. Ensure that assessments and plans are consistently up to date, reflective of children's views and clear about what is expected of families.
4. Ensure that strategy discussions involve the full range of relevant agencies, so that the full range of relevant information informs the assessment of risk.
5. Ensure that children looked after receive timely therapeutic support when they need it.
6. Improve the quality of plans when children return to their families from care, so that there is clarity about what services will be provided, who will provide them, by when and what they are aimed at achieving.
7. Ensure that professionals consistently implement actions required between review meetings for children looked after.
8. Ensure that the good support experienced by the vast majority of care leavers is extended to all care leavers, so that their needs are better met.
9. Strengthen the quality of learning from audits through better involvement and use of feedback from children and their families.
10. Improve the functioning of the overview and scrutiny panel to ensure that it is more sharply focused on children and that its work has an impact on improving both services for children and the outcomes that they achieve.

Summary for children and young people

- Services for children and young people in Harrow are good. Most children and young people have the support 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 come to know them well. This helps them to know what type of support will be most helpful. There are plenty of different services that give good support to children and their families to help them to overcome their difficulties.
- There are some parts of the service that could do better. Managers and council leaders recognise this and are determined to improve services for children and families. Overall, they are doing a good job.
- When children are at immediate risk, social workers and other adults, such as police officers and teachers, work together well. They act quickly to protect children.
- 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 have become involved with gangs.
- Sometimes, when children need help but are not at immediate risk, they do not have the assessments or help that they need quite as quickly as they could. The council knows this and is working hard to do better.
- Plans about how to make things better for children are not always as clear as they could be. It is important that everybody understands what has to change and what they are expected to do.
- Social workers work hard to find the right place for children to live if they cannot live with their own families. They want children looked after to be happy, to do well at school and to make successful moves into adulthood. They try hard to do this and to make sure that children's experiences of being looked after are positive.
- Foster carers and adopters are very positive about the support that they receive to help to make sure that children and young people are settled in their homes. Social workers pay good attention to things that may help children to settle in, like the religion of foster carers, the languages they speak and how near they live to children's schools.
- Young people leaving care receive a good service. Staff keep in touch with them and provide support to help them to keep healthy and 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.
- There is a good range of different types of places to live that are available for young people who are ready to leave care. They have good help in learning how to live independently and manage their own lives.

<p>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</p>	<p>Requires improvement</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>When children in Harrow are at risk of significant harm, the local authority acts quickly and effectively to address their needs and reduce risk. The multi-agency safeguarding hub provides an effective single point of contact that transfers child protection concerns promptly to the first response team (FRT) for assessment and intervention. Thresholds are well understood and are consistently applied. The vast majority of strategy discussions are timely, but rarely involve agencies other than the police and children’s social care. This limited involvement from other key agencies, such as health, means that decisions are not always informed by the full range of relevant information available.</p> <p>Children with lower levels of need do not routinely receive such a prompt response. Most decisions to transfer children’s cases to the FRT for a child in need assessment or to early-help services take longer than 24 hours. This means that some children do not have their needs assessed or receive services as quickly as they could. Performance management systems in the multi-agency safeguarding hub do not provide enough information to accurately track the progress of children’s cases to ensure the timeliness of assessments and service provision.</p> <p>There are a number of well-established and effective targeted early-help services to support children in Harrow. However, the number of children with additional needs who could benefit from an assessment and a coordinated early-help response from the local authority and partner agencies, and who are receiving one, are low. At the time of the inspection, a substantial redesign and reorganisation of these services were in the process of implementation, but were at too early a stage to have had an impact.</p> <p>Social workers see children regularly and know them well. Good direct work with children is used to gain an understanding of their wishes and feelings. This is a real strength of the service. This good knowledge of children’s wishes and feelings is not always fully reflected in written assessments. Although assessments identify risk factors and strengths, some lack sufficient depth and analysis, for example in the consideration of culture and ethnicity. Some assessments do not accurately identify all concerns or take enough account of historic factors. Plans, following assessment, are of variable quality. Poorer examples are not always sufficiently specific or clear about the outcomes that they aim to achieve, or about what is expected of families. This makes it more difficult to use plans to drive and measure progress.</p> <p>Work to protect children and young people from the risks associated with going missing, sexual exploitation and related concerns, such as gang affiliation, is good</p>	

and improving. Most children and young people receive a service that is well coordinated between agencies and reduces risk.

Inspection findings

11. The local authority acts quickly and effectively to protect children when they are at risk of significant harm. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides an effective single point of contact that transfers child protection concerns promptly to the first response team (FRT). This team holds strategy discussions and undertakes child protection enquiries when this is appropriate. Thresholds of need are well understood and consistently applied. However, children with lower levels of need do not always receive such a prompt response. Decisions to transfer children's cases to the FRT for a child in need assessment or to early-help service are appropriate, but most take longer than 24 hours. This means that some children do not have their needs fully assessed or receive services as quickly as they could. Delays in progressing referrals promptly are a long-standing concern identified by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) case audits. Progress in improving this deficit is hampered by the existing performance systems in the MASH, as these do not give managers full or timely information to track the progress of children's cases accurately. (Recommendation)
12. Out of office hours, the emergency duty team provides an effective social work service. Timely and well-considered responses by this team ensure that children are kept safe. Effective on-call and management arrangements ensure that additional staffing can quickly be put in place to manage times of increased demand. Good communication with daytime teams ensures that children are quickly linked to services that match their needs.
13. Social workers visit children regularly and know them well. This means that children and their parents can build relationships of trust with social workers. This enables social workers to have a more accurate understanding of children's needs and to focus help appropriately, leading to improved outcomes for most children. Social workers have a strong focus on children, whose wishes and feelings are captured well through good direct work, observation and engagement in the majority of work with families. Children are sometimes taken out of lessons to facilitate direct work, despite feedback from children that they do not like it and that it has a negative impact on their relationships with friends and classmates. While there will be occasions on which this practice is unfortunately unavoidable, as standard practice it is unacceptable.
14. The number of children with additional needs who could benefit from an assessment and coordinated early-help response from the local authority and partner agencies and who are receiving this is low. It is of concern that no partner agencies, such as health organisations or schools, are undertaking the role of lead professional following those common assessment framework assessments that have been completed. Although early intervention workers

are quickly allocated to families and do undertake some good work, most assessments seen by inspectors were poor. Consequently, much early-help work lacks focus or a clear benchmark against which to measure progress. This means that help to some children and their families is not as effective as it could be. (Recommendation)

15. The local authority has carried out a detailed review of early-help services and is aware of these areas for development. At the time of the inspection, a substantial redesign and reorganisation of these services was in the process of implementation. The steps that the local authority has taken to restructure and relocate its early-help services into community hubs, such as youth centres and children's centres, are well considered, but at too early a stage to have had a measurable impact.
16. Although early-help services to children with multiple or more complex additional needs are not consistently well coordinated, the local authority does provide a number of well-established and successfully targeted early-help services. These include a domestic abuse group work programme for victims and their children, direct work with young people who are involved with gangs, and a volunteering scheme which increases young people's skills and confidence and enables them to mentor other young people. These services complement a strong children's centres offer and are leading to improved outcomes for children.
17. The threshold between children who could benefit from early-help services and those who need a statutory social work response is well understood and applied. This is also the case for the threshold between children who are in need and those at risk of significant harm who require a child protection response. However, the rationale for decision making is not always recorded clearly enough, particularly when strategy discussions lead to a decision not to proceed with child protection enquiries. Child protection strategy discussions are timely, but rarely involve agencies other than the police and the local authority. This limited involvement from other key agencies, such as health, means that decisions are not always informed by the full range of relevant information available. (Recommendation)
18. The quality of assessments is not consistently good. Although assessments routinely identify risk factors and strengths, many lack sufficient breadth of consideration and depth of analysis, for example in their consideration of the important role that culture and religion can play in children's sense of identity and belonging. Some do not accurately identify all concerns or take full account of historic factors. Chronologies are not consistently used to understand children's stories and the impact of patterns of risk. Although there is a new chronology template to support improved practice in this area, it is too new to have had an impact on all children's cases. (Recommendation)
19. While social workers have a strong focus on listening to children and understanding their wishes and feelings through strong direct work,

observation and engagement, messages from children do not always inform assessments and plans directly enough. When assessments are commissioned for children recently referred to the local authority, a sharp focus on timeliness is ensuring that almost all assessments are completed to a timescale that matches the seriousness and urgency of their needs. However, assessments for children in need and those on child protection plans are not always updated and so, in some cases, do not reflect children's current circumstances. This, in turn, means that plans do not always reflect their current needs. Plans are not always clear and specific enough. The outcomes that they are aimed at achieving are not always defined clearly enough, nor is it always clear what is expected of families. Most plans do not include contingency arrangements. (Recommendation)

20. Child in need meetings and child protection core groups are almost always held regularly, but discussions in these meetings do not always focus on agreed actions. As a consequence, plans are not used as well as they could be to either drive or measure progress. Good agency attendance at these meetings and social workers' sound knowledge of the families that they are working with help to limit the impact of these areas of weakness and ensure that, for most children, the involvement of the local authority in their lives is leading to improved outcomes.
21. Child protection conferences are well chaired. Although they are child centred and sensitive to families, they keep an appropriate focus on risk. Children have access to support from an advocate to attend these meetings, and inspectors saw evidence of this service being used to good effect. While the local authority has a systemic approach to monitoring children's attendance and engagement in conferences, it recognises that there are some children who are not benefiting from being as involved in their conferences as they could be. Child protection chairs add value, because of their ability to offer independent advice and improve practice. Multi-agency engagement in child protection conferences is a strength. When there has been poor attendance by any particular agency, this has been identified and escalated by chairs, leading to improved attendance.
22. Children in need and subject to child protection plans receive effective help from a range of targeted support services. Multi-agency engagement is strong and services work well together, particularly when responding to the impact on children of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse and parental mental ill health. Pre-birth assessments of babies who may go on to be in need or at risk after they are born are good. This was an area for priority action identified at the time of Ofsted's last inspection, and continued to be an issue of concern identified by the 'Baby F' serious case review published in 2015. A sharpened focus on this work and the introduction of a pre-birth assessment toolkit have supported improved inter-agency communication, particularly with midwifery, and timelier and clearer assessments for these babies. A well-used 'neglect toolkit' has had a similar positive impact on improving the identification of risk when it stems from a chronic pattern of concern.

23. When children are at risk through living in homes where there is domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse or parental mental ill health, meetings designed to coordinate support services work well. The multi-agency public protection arrangements and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) share information and coordinate services effectively. Good information sharing and engagement in the MARAC process by social workers is successfully reducing the risks to which children are exposed. Discussion between agencies at MARAC achieves tangible improvements to the lives of children who are exposed to domestic abuse.
24. Work to identify and to protect children and young people from the risk of sexual exploitation is good and improving. Most children and young people receive a service that is well coordinated between agencies, identifies the harm that they have suffered or are at risk of suffering and reduces risk. The multi-agency sexual exploitation panel is effective. A risk assessment tool is routinely well used to assess risks when they first come to light, but is not yet consistently used to reassess risk. This means that social workers are not always absolutely clear about how successful the actions taken have been in reducing risk. A specialist team, including a child sexual exploitation coordinator, a missing person's worker and a gangs worker, is important in ensuring a joined-up approach to these closely related areas of risk, and has been central to the improvements that have been achieved in the past six months, particularly with regard to the timeliness of return home interviews.
25. A children at risk meeting, chaired by the divisional director of children and young people services, is used effectively to track the circumstances and progress of those children who are currently missing or who have been missing in the previous week. Strategy meetings are held appropriately when risks escalate. Although over two thirds of children and young people receive a return home interview within 72 hours of being found, this means that nearly a third are waiting too long to have the opportunity for an interview. Copies of return home interviews are included in children's and young people's electronic case files, but the information that they contain is not used consistently enough to inform planning about how to keep them safe or to reduce the likelihood of them going missing again.
26. Effective work is undertaken to identify and track children missing education. An up-to-date list of children missing education is maintained by the children missing education officer. The children missing education policy and procedures provide clear guidance to professionals. Information sharing within the local authority and partners is effective. Staff have a sound overview of the welfare of children who are electively home educated. Good liaison with families and information sharing with schools, families and other services has contributed to a decrease in the number of families who are choosing home education when it may not be in the individual best interests of their children.
27. Disabled children receive a good service in Harrow. Experienced social workers consider the full range of children's needs, whether these relate to disability or

their broader welfare concerns. Transitions to adult services are well managed. When there are child protection concerns, these are addressed promptly and effectively.

28. Social workers in Harrow know their communities well. They make good use of interpreters when this is necessary, and have an understanding of the complex dynamics when there are concerns about abuse or neglect in a particular cultural context. This is apparent in a clear, effective and well-joined-up approach to the issue of female genital mutilation, in links with community resources such as an Asian women's resource centre and in positive work with families who have no recourse to public funds.
29. Work to tackle the risks to children and young people from radicalisation through Harrow's 'Prevent' partnership is well established. Counter-radicalisation work with children and young people is aligned with wider child protection, child in need and early-help work, so that children benefit from a broad consideration of their needs and a joined-up approach to meeting them. Awareness-raising and engagement work has successfully increased the understanding by professionals and the local community. An integrated response to children at risk of radicalisation, gang affiliation, going missing and child sexual exploitation has resulted in a stronger and more effective approach. Harrow's gangs worker operates at both a strategic and operational level, and his work is valued by young people. The carefully designed gangs direct work programme ensures that young people have the opportunity to think about their gang affiliations, to share their worries and fears in a safe environment, and to work towards making choices that will help to keep them safer. Young people value the individualised approach provided by the Harrow gangs worker.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>When children need to be looked after in Harrow, the response is swift and child centred. Children only become looked after when this is necessary and in their best interests. Social workers visit children looked after regularly, know them well and build strong relationships with them. They have high aspirations for them. Children receive a good service, and timely and effective decisions are made so that they move to permanent homes as quickly as possible. Social workers demonstrate a proactive approach and work hard to secure homes for children with brothers and sisters, older children and disabled children. When legal proceedings are necessary to secure children’s safety, assessments and support to children and their families are timely and appropriate. When the plan is for children to return home, most do so successfully. However, a few children experience delay and a lack of clarity in the delivery of services to support their return home.</p> <p>Good participation and engagement by children means that their views are used well to inform planning and decisions made about their care plans. Reviews are regular and are held within appropriate timescales. Improvements are needed in some children’s reviews, including better organisation and preparation by social workers and independent reviewing officers. Actions are not always progressed quickly enough between review meetings, causing delays in care planning for a few children. An effective and committed children looked after health service is improving health outcomes for children, including significant progress in the timeliness of initial and review health assessments. However, some children do not receive appropriate therapeutic and emotional health support services quickly enough. Children looked after benefit from an impressive range of creative and innovative participation and engagement opportunities, and an active Children in Care Council, ‘Beyond limits’.</p> <p>Children needing a range of alternative permanent families benefit from early parallel planning, careful matching with carers and adopters, and good support plans. Adoption work is very strong. Children’s arrangements are secure, and placement and adoption breakdowns are rare. ‘Together or apart’ assessments are mostly good, but some variation in the depth of analysis and the clarity with which children’s voices are recorded means that they do not always add the value that they could to the decision-making process.</p> <p>A large majority of care leavers receive good support that helps them to achieve well in their education and career aspirations, and in developing the skills that they need to live independently. Many achieve well and make a successful transition to adulthood. However, for a small minority, there are delays in providing support in key areas, such as their emotional well-being, education, employment and training.</p>	

Inspection findings

30. When children need to be looked after in Harrow, the response is swift and child-centred. When legal proceedings are necessary to secure children's safety, assessments and support to children and their families are timely and appropriate. Permanence, including through return to birth families, is considered at the earliest opportunity. Children are not looked after unnecessarily.
31. The Public Law Outline (PLO) process is used well to ensure that there is no drift or delay in planning for children, either within court proceedings or at the pre-proceedings stage. Regular management oversight and tracking systems help to prevent drift for children needing permanence. When delays are identified, reasons for this are clearly recorded in children's case files, and actions are quickly agreed and implemented to address them. Pre-proceedings letters are of high quality, so families understand exactly what is expected of them. They are encouraged to seek legal advice and are helped to access interpreting and translation support services, when needed. When children do need to be the subject of care proceedings, the local authority ensures that these are completed quickly to avoid delay and uncertainty for children.
32. The majority of children who return home do so successfully, with low numbers of children experiencing a subsequent looked-after episode. Appropriate decisions are made when children do need to become looked after for a second time or when their circumstances change. For some children returning home, there is a delay in the provision of the appropriate support services needed to reduce continued disruption to children's lives. Plans in place to support children who have returned home need to be implemented more quickly. Support for children on the edge of care is not consistently well targeted, coordinated or monitored. The local authority is aware of this deficit, but the plans to improve services through a 'reunification local offer' are at too early a stage to have had an impact on improving practice. (Recommendation)
33. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and social work teams, including the emergency duty service and independent reviewing officers (IROs), link together at an early stage to share information and consider viable permanence options for children. Strong professional relationships and the sharing of key information about risks to children support effective communication between partners and early identification of children's needs. This continues for children whose journey to permanence is through the PLO process. Low numbers of emergency and urgent care applications are indicative of good planning for children and early anticipation of their needs.
34. There is a strong commitment and expectation in Harrow that children live with their extended family and with their brothers and sisters when it is safe

and appropriate for them to do so. This is demonstrated by the 15% who left care due to special guardianship orders (SGOs) made during 2015–16, ensuring that children achieve early permanence while continuing to live with their families. There is a wide range of service provision and extensive support available to families undergoing SGO assessments. This includes effective use of family group conferences in identifying viable options for where children will live. Direct work with children prepares them well for permanent moves to special guardians, long-term foster carers or adopters.

35. Social workers develop strong, open relationships with children and their families, and have a good understanding of children's individual needs. Cultural heritage is well considered. Social workers know children well and talk about them positively, including those who find engagement difficult and experience challenges in managing their behaviour. Visits to see children are regular, and children are mostly seen alone. Inspectors saw evidence that social workers help young children to understand difficult and complicated decisions about their lives and demonstrate a real commitment to engaging older young people who have ongoing high-risk behaviours. Children told inspectors: 'my social worker is very helpful', 'she tells me what's going on' and 'my social worker helped me to stay with my gran.'
36. Assessments to decide applicants' suitability for fostering roles are almost always comprehensive, with careful analysis of issues relating to their life experiences, ethnicity, faith and values. For a small number of carers, discussion at fostering panel could be more searching about how their personal values may affect them in their fostering role. Supervising social workers visit foster carers regularly and record detailed discussions. Areas for development are explored alongside warm and positive feedback about the difference that carers have made for children. During these visits, fostering social workers explore missing from home incidents and check whether all important meetings and assessments have happened, such as personal education plans (PEPs) and health reviews. This supports children's progress. Foster carers' annual reviews are timely, clear and help them to reflect on their practice and develop their skills.
37. Foster carers told inspectors that, overall, they appreciate the quality of the training and support that they receive, including the advice and involvement of a play therapist. They say that they are well supported by the managers in the fostering service. One foster carer said, 'They definitely make you feel valued' and another 'They recognise that we have a challenging job and stand shoulder to shoulder with us, treating us like fellow professionals.' Some expressed frustration about too many changes in fostering and children's social workers, saying that this is unsettling for them and for the children in their care. They reported that they cannot always get through to social workers on the phone.
38. Children are generally well matched with foster carers, including in relation to cultural and ethnic factors. This is true for both short- and long-term foster

care arrangements. When this is not possible, consideration is given to the emotional impact and risks to children of moving to an alternative home. Decisions are made in children's best interests. Workers are proactive in their approaches to foster carers and, as a result, children with care plans for long-term fostering secure permanence quickly, reducing disruption and enabling them to maintain close relationships with carers.

39. An appropriate range of recruitment activity for foster carers takes place, including high-quality features in local publications with diverse and inclusive images. Despite this, the local authority has not met its own targets for the recruitment of foster carers. Eleven new carers have been approved since April 2016, but this is still seven short of the ambitious target set by the local authority. The local authority commissions placements from a range of independent providers to ensure that, despite this shortfall, it has a sufficient range of placements for children and young people. Short-term placement stability is in line with similar authorities, while long-term stability, although improving, continues to fluctuate and remains a challenge for the local authority. A small number of children continue to experience a high number of moves. For these children, the local authority has taken appropriate steps to find alternative homes that can best meet their highly complex needs. This particular sufficiency challenge is being addressed through a range of provision, both 'in-house' and commissioned through an independent framework agreement across the West London Alliance. A recent rise in the number of children living in foster homes is positive, but has not led to any reduction in the local authority's use of residential children's homes for teenagers with complex needs.
40. Strategy meetings held to plan responses to children and young people who go missing from care, and those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, are timely and are supported by good information sharing from partner agencies. This is helping to keep children and young people safe. The great majority of children receive timely return home interviews. While intelligence gathered is used to inform some children's risk assessments and decisions about where it is safe for them to live, the cumulative impact of repeat incidents is not always well understood or analysed to help to keep children safe. Workers and carers do make consistent attempts to engage with young people so that support plans can be progressed.
41. All children looked after attend registered provision, with a small number in alternative provision or missing education. While the majority of children and young people attend school regularly, a high proportion of children looked after have been persistently absent from school. Although this number has reduced recently, action to return children to education swiftly is not always effective, and a small minority of children continue to remain out of education for too long.
42. Managers have accurately identified the key improvements needed to better support the attainment and progress of children looked after. As a result, the

virtual school is taking steps to improve outcomes for children, and these are beginning to make a difference to them. The virtual school monitors the attendance and progress of children regularly. This enhances the oversight of those who experience disruption to their learning and those at risk of not achieving, including those children who are placed out of the area. This results in targeted actions that better support those children who are at risk of not succeeding. Often the virtual school team acts as an effective advocate for children and young people, and is persistent in offering support to them when they experience problems at school or at home.

43. The virtual school team has made good progress in improving the proportion of children with up-to-date PEPs, and staff have a good understanding of when further improvements are needed. Staff are working hard with schools and social workers to improve the quality of PEPs. However, too many PEPs are not fully completed. When this is the case, important information is missing, such as children's views and details of how the pupil premium grant is being used to address the specific needs of individual children.
44. Children looked after achieve at around the national rate for children looked after at key stages 1 and 2. Historically, attainment at key stage 4 has been comparatively poor, but, as a result of better targeting of practical support to pupils in key stage 4 last year, the attainment of these pupils improved to the national rate for children looked after. Data shows that this year, as a result of improved support, a greater proportion of pupils are on track to achieve well at key stage 4. However, the gap between the attainment of children looked after and their peers remains wide. The good support provided to young people by schools, the virtual school and partners ensures that a high proportion of young people, many of whom have few qualifications, remain in education, employment and training when they complete Year 11 through to Year 13.
45. Children's health needs receive significant oversight and monitoring from the children looked after health service and, as a result, their health outcomes continue to improve. Strong relationships between the service, social work teams and partners, complemented by effective tracking systems, help with effective communication and information sharing. As a consequence, children's health needs are identified quickly, and timescales for initial and review health assessments are improving rapidly. Children's involvement in and feedback of their experience are pivotal to this recent success and have helped to inform improvements to the service. A sharp focus on improving the completion rate of strengths and difficulties questionnaires by children looked after has seen the rate rise from only 41% during 2015–16 to 75% at the end of December 2016. This is positive, although further work is required to meet the 81% average figure for similar local authorities.
46. The health needs of children placed out of the local authority area are actively monitored. The children looked after health nurse challenges any delays effectively to ensure that children receive a timely service. A small number of

children were seen by inspectors to experience delays in receiving timely therapeutic support. Children needing specialist support from the child and adolescent mental health services often have to wait for help. This is also reported by children's foster carers. (Recommendation)

47. Children benefit from an impressive range of creative and innovative participation and engagement opportunities. All children receive information about advocacy, the independent visitors scheme and their entitlements from the children's pledge. Workers show a continuous commitment to attending engagement activities that help to gain children's views and wishes. Workers have high aspirations for children and support them to try new experiences to develop their social, emotional and educational skills. Engagement activity includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those who may not want to be actively involved in Harrow's very active Children in Care Council, 'Beyond limits'. A number of annual activities are arranged specifically to encourage the participation of children living outside of the local authority. The local authority does well in engaging local businesses and sports clubs to provide both work and wider social opportunities for children looked after. For example, the local authority involved Queens Park Rangers football club in a recent football development activity for children looked after.
48. Children benefit from regular, timely reviews, and have an opportunity to meet with their IRO prior to meetings. If children do not attend, their views and wishes are represented in a variety of formats and are used to inform appropriate decisions. When instability or significant changes occur in children's lives, reviews are brought forward to make appropriate changes to their care plans. The IRO service is generally effective in identifying and challenging delays to ensure that children receive the right help. However, foster carers did share some frustrations with inspectors about a lack of consistency. These include some actions not being followed up between reviews, leading to delays in support for children, and that IROs and children's social workers are, on occasion, insufficiently prepared for meetings (Recommendation).
49. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds who are homeless or in danger of homelessness are quickly and accurately assessed to decide whether they should become looked after by the local authority or if it is more appropriate to provide support in other ways. These young people are provided with support and accommodation that meets their needs. Bed and breakfast accommodation is not used, and careful attention is paid to their vulnerabilities.

<p>The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good</p>
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50. In Harrow, all children are considered for adoption when they are unable to live within their birth family. Careful matching and good post-adoption support

have resulted in no children experiencing an adoption breakdown in recent years.

51. A combination of a drop in the number of placement orders being granted and decisions being moved away from adoption has led to a reduction in the number of children leaving care to be adopted, in Harrow. This has fallen from 10 children in 2015–16 to a projected six children being adopted by the end of March 2017. There are currently four children in adoptive families. Harrow has a lower rate of children looked after than similar areas, and fewer children in care aged under 10 years. Decisions which have been changed away from adoption are typically due to the availability of wider family members to care permanently for children. The number of children leaving care for special guardianship arrangements went up to 15% in 2015–16, with a similar rise seen in recent in-year figures. Evidence shows that this resulted in good outcomes for children, and disruptions to special guardianship arrangements are rare in Harrow. Therefore, the current rates of adoption appear appropriate in the context of the wider children looked after population.
52. Children's journeys to adoption are very timely for almost all children, with performance against national thresholds being well above the average in England. Local in-year data shows a very slight slowing down of performance, but it is still very timely for children. Managers know individual children well and can account for delays in a small number of complex cases.
53. Children's progress is closely monitored to avoid any unnecessary delay. Regular permanence planning meetings and legal planning meetings are attended by the adoption manager. A tracking manager is partly based with 'front-door' social work teams to ensure that all social workers 'think permanence' at the earliest opportunity. As a result, early parallel planning is well embedded and is particularly effective in securing adoption for very young children, allowing secure attachments to be made. Early family finding ahead of a placement order being granted means that some children can, at the appropriate point, move quickly to prospective adopters. However, this is slowed down for a few children by avoidable external causes, such as delays in police checks. In a very small number of cases, children's adoption could have been secured even sooner.
54. Children's permanence records are of a good standard. Social workers prepare life-story books for children. These give extensive information about their birth family and journey to their new family. Later-life letters are well written, giving young people a sensitive but straightforward account of their life story. However, social workers currently make limited use of learning from research. The profile of children being adopted, although small in number, has become more ethnically diverse than in previous years and there have been recent adoptions of children with disabilities and groups of brothers and sisters. 'Together or apart' assessments are mostly of a high standard. Variations in the depth of analysis and the clarity with which children's voices are recorded

mean that a minority do not add the full value that they could to the decision-making process.

55. Decisions made by the agency decision maker (ADM) are timely and detail a clear rationale for plans for adoption. The combined fostering and adoption panel is constituted of highly experienced and committed individuals who reflect the range and diversity of Harrow's community. Regular feedback to social workers has contributed to improvement in the quality of reports coming to panel. Feedback from adopters who have attended the panel is positive. Adopters value the face-to-face meeting with the panel's medical adviser, because it helps them to understand the current and future health needs of their child. However, links between the ADM and the panel chair have been limited, to date, and managers have already recognised this as an area for improvement.
56. Harrow's partnership arrangement with a voluntary adoption agency (VAA) gives access to a broad range of approved adopters across the country, as well as the national adoption register and local consortia. A diverse range of adopters have been matched to children, including single parents and same-sex couples. Children are carefully matched and many benefit from being adopted by families that reflect their own culture and ethnicity. Prospective adopter records completed by the VAA are very detailed, and reflect a thorough assessment process and clear analysis of the parenting capacity of the applicants.
57. Adopters are positive about their experiences of the assessment process, and preparation days have helped them to relate to their child's experience and the experience of the birth family. They receive detailed information about their child and value the support from social workers. As one said, 'Nothing is too much trouble.'
58. There has been just one foster for adoption placement, to date, in Harrow. However, foster for adoption and concurrent care are discussed with all prospective adopters during assessment and are promoted during preparation. A number of concurrent placements have meant that very young children have a minimal number of placement moves and attach at an early stage to their prospective adopters. Children are well prepared for moving in with their adoptive families. Foster carers are highly skilled in preparing children for adoption, and have completed specialist training.
59. Adoption support plans are sensitive and detailed. Contact arrangements are carefully considered for children moving to adoption, and a letterbox contact coordinator works within the adoption team. When it has been important for children to maintain some direct contact with key people, careful matching has secured adopters who understand and will support this contact.
60. Post-adoption support for families is a strength in Harrow. An experienced adoption team, including a play therapist, provides easy-to-access help when

it is needed. There are strong links with the virtual school, and this results in targeted support for children at risk of exclusion. Therapeutic support is frequently funded through the adoption support fund, with 13 children receiving grants since April 2016, and all applications to date have been successful. In addition, a commissioned service provides bespoke therapeutic work with birth families, adopters and their children. Many Harrow adopters use a variety of support groups provided by the partner VAA, such as groups for same-sex adopters. This means that families benefit from open-ended support through the VAA. As one adopter put it, 'knowing you can come back in one, two or 20 years is key' to choosing to adopt with Harrow.

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

61. Care leavers in Harrow receive good support which helps many to achieve good outcomes. These include making good progress in further and higher education, and living in safe and secure accommodation. They develop their skills to live independently well. However, the good support that the majority of those leaving care receive is not experienced by all. For a small minority, there are delays in receiving the support and help that they need in key areas of their lives, such as support for their education, training and employment, their mental health and in accessing sexual health services.
(Recommendation)
62. Social workers and social work assistants form positive and productive relationships with care leavers. They encourage them to aim high and achieve their goals. This leads to the good outcomes that the majority achieve. Staff and managers know care leavers well. They understand their needs and circumstances, and see them regularly. This includes those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, are parents themselves or are in custody. In the majority of cases, when care leavers' needs become more acute or their circumstances change, staff increase their contact and take effective action to mitigate the risks that they face, such as the breakdown of their tenancy.
63. When care leavers lose touch with the leaving care team, staff almost always take all reasonable steps to engage with them, including via text, phone, through family and known friends, and by unannounced visits. Care leavers told inspectors that they trust staff, whom they can readily turn to when they need help. One comment, 'he's like family', was typical of the high regard in which staff from the leaving care team are held.
64. Staff plan well to meet care leavers' needs, with many good examples of them receiving effective practical help that supports both their immediate and longer-term needs. Nearly all care leavers have an up-to-date pathway plan.

Typically, plans are clear, focus well on the needs of care leavers and capture their views effectively.

65. Managers and staff have high aspirations for all care leavers, including those who arrive in the United Kingdom as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This is reflected in the very good support that they receive with regard to their accommodation, health, education and career aspirations. Many young people who have sought asylum have high aspirations for themselves, such as to become architects, lawyers, chefs or entrepreneurs. With very well-tailored individual support, many are making excellent progress towards these goals. The help that they receive enables them to settle well and engage with the wider community.
66. Managers ensure that there is an appropriate range of accommodation available to care leavers. There are a small number of care leavers who remain with their foster carers when they reach 18 years of age or live in supported lodgings. Most live in semi-independent accommodation. Staff and managers never use bed and breakfast accommodation as an option for care leavers, even in an emergency.
67. Care leavers receive good support from the leaving care team and housing providers to develop the skills that they need to live independently. All those who move into independent accommodation take a two-day course in preparation. Managers and staff make accurate assessments of care leavers' readiness to live independently and provide support accordingly. Such support ranges from such everyday matters, such as advice on managing a budget, up to help in saving for and securing a mortgage. As a result, over the past year all but one care leaver have successfully maintained their tenancy.
68. Care leavers receive good guidance from their social worker, social work assistant and the specialist careers adviser to help them to achieve well in their education. There are a good number of care leavers at university, many of whom are making excellent progress. While at university, care leavers receive additional funding that helps them successfully to complete their studies, for example through payment for accommodation during holiday periods.
69. The number of care leavers who are in education, training or employment is good. Published data for 19- to 21-year-olds shows that a higher proportion of care leavers are in education, training and employment than in similar local authorities and in England overall. More recent local data shows that approximately three quarters of all those supported by the leaving care team have an education, training or employment place, including a small number who are undertaking apprenticeships.
70. Staff provide good, practical assistance to maintain good health. Most care leavers register with their local doctor and dentist, and attend medical appointments that meet their specific health needs. Staff accompany

sometimes quite nervous care leavers to their appointments. Care leavers told inspectors how much they value the practical assistance that they receive. Additional health screening for tuberculosis for asylum-seeking young people meets their health needs well. Managers have recently introduced a health passport that brings together care leavers' health histories so that they are better placed to manage their own health as they gain greater independence.

71. Staff promote care leavers' entitlements effectively through, for example, a regular and very well-attended forum for care leavers and a widely circulated charter that outlines the local authority's commitment to them. As a result, care leavers know whom to turn to should they wish to complain about any aspect of the support that they are receiving. The leaving care team responds effectively when care leavers raise concerns about the help that they are receiving.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>A strong and energetic senior management team with a sense of direction, robust governance arrangements and clear lines of accountability is having a positive impact on the way in which services are designed, developed and delivered. This is helping children to achieve good outcomes.</p> <p>The local authority knows itself well. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development, and are making intelligent use of qualitative and quantitative data to address shortfalls and raise standards. Learning from audits is acted on and the quality of practice is improving. With greater use of feedback from children and families, the impact of audits would be further strengthened.</p> <p>A strong focus on and investment in social worker recruitment are having a positive impact on reducing both a reliance on agency staff and staff turnover. A low level of exit interviews limits the gathering of information in order to develop the recruitment and retention strategy further, and is an area of development in an otherwise thorough approach. Workforce development is a significant priority in Harrow, and social workers’ professional development is supported by a well-planned and resourced offer of training. Investment in staffing has ensured that social workers have manageable caseloads, and this means that they are able to visit children regularly to come to know them and their families well and build relationships of trust. This supports the achievement of improved outcomes for children.</p> <p>The local authority, through its corporate parenting panel, demonstrates a clear commitment to improving the life chances of children looked after. The sufficiency strategy is clear and coherent, with relevant priorities linked to present and future need. Appropriate commissioning arrangements are in place to ensure that there is a range of placements to meet the needs of children looked after.</p> <p>Services for children who go missing and those at risk of sexual exploitation are good and improving. Most receive effective and well-coordinated help and protection. There is an effective structure of both strategic and operational meetings to develop services and track performance, and to monitor and intervene in the cases of individual children. The timeliness of return home interviews has improved significantly, but remains a priority, given that almost a third take over 72 hours to complete.</p>	

The local authority's overview and scrutiny panel is not consistently effective. There is no stand-alone children's scrutiny committee and, while some important issues affecting children's outcomes have been discussed at the scrutiny committee, there is still insufficient focus or challenge on matters affecting children.

Inspection findings

72. The director of children's services and the divisional director for children and young people's services provide highly visible and strong leadership, with a clear focus on improving the quality of services for local children. Effective communication between senior officers and elected members, combined with clear governance arrangements, ensures that there is a sharp focus on improving outcomes for children. Regular face-to-face meetings between the chief executive, the director of children's services, the lead member and the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) facilitate a shared understanding of the key challenges for children's social care. Senior leaders understand the scale of the challenges that they and their staff face, and are realistic about strengths and areas for development, such as the need to implement planned improvements to early-help services and to further improve the timeliness and quality of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
73. The role of director of children's services also has a strategic statutory responsibility for adult social care services, children's social care and public health. Although this is a wide span of control, a clear line of sight to frontline practice is maintained. An appropriate statement of assurance has been undertaken to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to fulfil these roles.
74. There is a strong commitment to performance management at all levels of the organisation. Meetings involving elected members, including the leader, senior managers and the LSCB chair, ensure that a determined focus is kept on performance. The business analysis function collects a wide range of relevant up-to-date performance data, helping to create a culture in which performance is seen as everybody's business. This data enables all managers to drill down to individual, team and service performance, and provides a direct line of sight to what is happening at the frontline. Performance monitoring reports are routinely scrutinised, and information is used well to understand causes and identify possible solutions to any areas of poor performance. This grip on performance has enabled a focus on achieving and sustaining improvements in the timeliness of initial health assessments for children looked after and for single assessments, and continues to drive the development of the MASH.
75. The local authority makes good use of external reviews from relevant specialist bodies, such as the Local Government Association. This is reflective of a culture of openness to learning and improvement at all levels throughout

the organisation. A number of such reviews have been commissioned to help to evaluate the effectiveness of current provision. External audits of child sexual exploitation provision have helped to identify gaps, with the recommendations clearly acted upon. An external audit in December 2016 looked at placement provision for children looked after, and has made a number of recommendations to help Harrow to focus further on the sufficiency of placements.

76. Audits are used well to quality assure social work practice and gain an insight into how effectively services are improving the outcomes that children achieve. A clear audit programme, including senior leaders undertaking audits, is in place. Lessons learned from audits are used well to identify and address areas for improvement, including routine individual and team feedback. As part of this programme, observations of social work practice are undertaken to enhance the understanding of the service that children and families receive. The local authority recognises that more needs to be done to involve children and families, including seeking their views as part of the audit programme. However, this remains underdeveloped. (Recommendation)
77. Significant improvements have been made in the provision of services to children missing from home and care, and those at risk of sexual and gang exploitation. Most receive well-coordinated help and protection. Improvements in intelligence sharing, mapping of trends and disruption activity, along with more effective use of the multi-agency sexual exploitation meetings, have helped to keep Harrow children better protected. In particular, effective multi-agency mapping, coupled with proactive use of legislation, has been decisive in keeping some children safe. There is an effective structure of both strategic and operational meetings in place to develop services and track performance, and to monitor and intervene in the cases of individual children. The development of a specialist co-located team, including a child sexual exploitation coordinator, missing persons' worker and gang worker, has ensured a more focused and joined-up service for children.
78. While inspectors saw an improving picture, there is still further work to be done in ensuring the consistent use of the child sexual exploitation risk assessment tool. This is about ensuring that it is always used to assess risk, and is more particularly about ensuring that it is also used to assess how risk has reduced or increased over time and in response to the help provided. While the timeliness of return home interviews has improved significantly as a result of effective performance and contact management, almost a third of children and young people are still having to wait more than 72 hours to be seen.
79. A joined-up approach to recruitment, retention and development is having a positive impact in terms of making Harrow a more attractive place to work. Senior leaders have understood the importance of having a sufficient, skilled and stable workforce in order to drive improvement. They have invested both financially and in management time and focus to achieve this. Substantial

efforts are being made to recruit staff, such as the recruitment of qualified and appropriately experienced overseas workers and investing in the 'Step up' and 'Frontline' programmes. These are showing signs of fruition, with both the dependency on agency staff and the level of staff turnover reducing. A low level of exit interviews hampers the gathering of important information to further develop the social worker recruitment and retention strategy. The local authority's commitment to children's social work in Harrow is seen in the funding of extra social work provision in response to increasing demand in order to keep social work caseloads at a manageable level. This enables social workers to visit children regularly. (Recommendation)

80. The vast majority of social workers spoken to by inspectors were very positive about working for Harrow, and particularly mentioned visible and supportive leadership and management. The pod system of small groups of social workers, each supported by a skilled pod manager, is a strength which social workers almost universally report as supportive and which assists them in delivering a service to vulnerable children and families. Use of a systemic approach to practice is well embedded and adds value, enabling reflection and a holistic approach to the work with families. Most social workers are tenacious in their efforts to engage with children and families, and they speak with genuine warmth and knowledge about the children whom they are helping.
81. Managers pay careful attention to non-casework supervision areas, particularly training and development and workload management. In a small minority of cases, although both supervision and management oversight are regular, social workers do not receive clear enough direction to support fully effective practice with children. The vast majority of social workers have an up-to-date annual appraisal which clearly identifies their achievements and areas for development in the future. Social workers have access to a wide range of training and development opportunities, and are actively encouraged to participate.
82. The local authority's overview and scrutiny panel is not consistently effective. There is no stand-alone children's scrutiny committee and, while some important issues affecting children's outcomes have been discussed at the scrutiny committee, there is still insufficient focus and challenge on matters affecting children. For example, there has been little consideration of the effectiveness of services for children at risk of sexual exploitation. Recognition of the limitations of scrutiny prompted Harrow, in late 2016, to commission an external review focusing on how scrutiny can be better exercised. This review is ongoing, so is too recent to have had an impact. (Recommendation)
83. Elected members of the corporate parenting panel demonstrate a clear commitment to improving the life chances of children looked after. They have oversight of detailed performance information and analysis, with a range of professionals presenting reports. This helps them to clarify, challenge and question activity. Mandatory training enhances their understanding. The

corporate parenting strategy is detailed, and it sets clear priorities and the areas for improvement. There is an appropriate focus on monitoring action completion, but the lack of sufficient outcome information limits the ability to fully understand if completed actions have improved outcomes for children.

84. The Health and Wellbeing Board, chaired by the leader of the council, takes a 'whole life journey' approach to identifying priorities, and this includes a number relevant to the lives of children and young people. This 'high-level' vision is translated into a clear and well-focused commissioning plan by the multi-agency children's commissioning group. Through this group, the local authority, including public health, works closely and effectively with the clinical commissioning group and schools to ensure that there is an appropriate range of commissioned services to meet children's needs. Children and young people are being successfully involved in the design of service specifications and the commissioning process. Active contract management ensures an ongoing focus on the quality of services and, through this, the outcomes achieved by children. Children and young people are well involved in this process, leading to more sharply targeted services, including the development of sexual health services and the recent 'Future in mind' recommissioning of emotional well-being services for children and young people. Effective use of data and contract management is leading to the recommissioning of services, which are producing better outcomes. The cancellation of a previous contract to provide return home interviews led to the creation of a new in-house service, with subsequent improvements in timeliness of completion.
85. The sufficiency strategy 2015–17 is clear and coherent, with relevant priorities linked to present and future need. Appropriate commissioning arrangements are in place to ensure that there is a range of placements to meet the needs of children looked after. Steps are being taken to address gaps, such as the use of positive contracts through the West London Alliance, including innovative recommissioning of the framework for the provision of independent foster placements. The local authority has seen an increasing number of young people placed in private sector residential accommodation in the past year. The quality of such provision is overseen by the access to resources panel, which is chaired by the divisional director, and the use of such accommodation is continually reviewed to ensure that it is meeting need. For some young people, the decision to place outside of Harrow in such accommodation has been on the basis of well-evidenced assessments to address particular issues of risk.
86. The local authority responds to complaints in a well-organised and open way, with an increasing number being resolved at an early stage. When it identifies wider practice concerns, it takes steps to address and improve practice. Overall, numbers of complaints are reducing, and those that are made are being resolved increasingly quickly. However, the local authority's own audits from April to September 2016 show that in over half of children's case files audited there was no evidence of parents, carers or children being given information relating to access to records, complaints or advocacy. This means

that the local authority cannot be certain that it is actively seeking feedback from children and their families or making sure that they are aware of their entitlements.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board requires improvement

Executive summary

The Local Safeguarding Children Board in Harrow fulfils all of its statutory functions, as defined in 'Working together to safeguard children' 2015, and has made considerable progress in work to safeguard vulnerable children. Following the appointment of an experienced and knowledgeable chair, it remains well positioned to enhance the effectiveness and coordination of local safeguarding arrangements further. Key partner agencies are represented, and the board benefits from two highly effective lay members who offer exceptional levels of knowledgeable support and challenge.

The board demonstrates open and candid challenge between board members, and this has been effective in some areas, such as improving safeguarding practice within the multi-agency safeguarding hub. However, the board is insufficiently informed about the quality of all frontline services and practice. As a result of limited performance information supplied by some partner agencies, the board's data set does not fully reflect the range of services responsible for safeguarding children in Harrow, and analysis is limited. This inhibits the board's ability to monitor and understand the overall effectiveness of services and to challenge agencies when they fall short.

The board has coordinated effective multi-agency arrangements for responding to young people at risk of child sexual exploitation at both operational and strategic levels. Some of this area of work is still in development, but overall the arrangements to tackle child sexual exploitation are robust. Some children and young people have benefited from schools providing awareness-raising sessions regarding female genital mutilation, including one primary school.

The board's annual report provides helpful information on a wide range of issues. For example, there is a commentary on the Home Office review in Harrow of gangs and youth violence. This noted the effective operational partnership work, but identified the need for an overarching strategy, now led by the Safer Harrow Partnership.

The influence and participation of children and young people in aiding understanding and informing board priorities and providing ongoing feedback are in their infancy. The board is not yet systematically evaluating the effectiveness of the newly formed early-help services.

The board has a comprehensive range of training events and e-learning courses that have increased the number of practitioners who have received training. The training events include lessons learned from serious case reviews, including a

nationally recognised and highly regarded 'cartoon' account of a young person's experience of living in a neglectful home environment.

Recommendations

87. Work with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB)'s constituent agencies to ensure that the board receives a sufficient breadth and quality of performance information to support rigorous monitoring, analysis and challenge of the full range of safeguarding work with children in Harrow.
88. Strengthen the board's scrutiny of the quality and impact of early-help services.
89. Review the capacity and functioning of the board's sub-groups to ensure that they are all as effective as the best.
90. Engage children and young people more effectively in contributing to and developing the board's work and priorities.
91. Continue work with schools to significantly improve their engagement with the section 11 audit process.
92. Update the LSCB threshold document so that it is fully compliant with statutory guidance, and is as effective a document as it can be to support decision making by those working with children and their families.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

93. Governance arrangements are well established. The newly appointed independent chair of the board intends to retain the existing pattern of regular meetings with the chief executive, director of children's services, leader of the council and lead member, as well as senior managers from partner agencies. The detailed minutes of these meetings evidence that key priorities and issues of concern for children are shared at the most senior level. The chair of the board attends the Health and Wellbeing Board, at which the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB's) annual report is considered. The chair provides appropriate challenge to partners, ensuring that children's issues are prioritised. The board maintains a challenge log as a record of actions taken on a number of issues. In 2016, there were 15 challenges made. However, as the impact of these challenges is not recorded, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the board's challenge to agencies.
94. Key areas of the board's work are appropriately aligned with other relevant boards and multi-agency bodies. Work to prevent child sexual exploitation is

aligned with the Safer Harrow Partnership, and the board works in conjunction with the Harrow Safeguarding Adults Board to promote a 'think family approach' in relation to vulnerable adults. This ensures that the board has a pivotal role in coordinating work across the partnership to raise awareness of important issues. One example is work following a Home Office peer review initiative to end gang and youth violence, which resulted in a Harrow-specific preventative strategy on gangs, knife crime and violence.

95. The newly appointed chair has current, relevant experience. He is also the chair of another LSCB and contributes to work on pan-London LSCB work-streams. Further involvement in and work for a domestic abuse charity and as safeguarding adviser to the diocese of London give him an extensive understanding of board business and priorities. The board is financially sound, but is due to have a reduction in funding in the next budgetary year. The board plans to manage this by reducing the use of external auditors, and has confidence that there is the capacity in the partner organisations to complete more audits in-house. The board's auditing activity has been crucial in identifying practice weaknesses, for example within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and in relation to section 47 processes. The board has the agreement of all partners that, in the event of any unforeseen expenses, such as serious case reviews (SCRs), all partners will share the cost.
96. The board has appropriate multi-agency membership and is attended by sufficiently senior officers from a wide variety of relevant agencies. Board members are committed to improving the life chances of children. The two lay members involved at board level contribute very effectively, including one acting as a vice-chair for one of the sub-groups and for the board itself. The relationship between the board and the lead member is strong and effective, despite the lead member being newly appointed.
97. In the past two years, the board has moved forward significantly in its commitment to driving up the standard of safeguarding services provided by partner agencies. The board has had success in raising practice standards, but the extent of this has been hampered by a lack of available performance information from partner agencies and a consequent lack of analysis. This means that the board does not have a full or accurate picture of the differences that agencies are making for children, or of gaps and shortfalls in service delivery. For example, the waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services often are not provided as part of the data set for the board, and the opportunity is missed for this to be an area of challenge to health partners. Weakness in data provision therefore reduces the board's influence on the planning and commissioning of services, as it cannot systematically monitor or evaluate quality. (Recommendation)
98. Data and performance information sharing works better within the board when partners are able to share concerns, develop a shared understanding and take action to improve service provision. For example, the identification of a lack of proactive antenatal and midwifery engagement with vulnerable

pregnant women led to practice changes which now ensure earlier targeted engagement with these mothers. This promotes better support and more effective relationship building with the most vulnerable at the earliest possible stage. The board has worked effectively to influence the staffing provision in the MASH and the location of the police interview suite, in order to support and improve the assessments of all children.

99. Early-help provision has been subject to a series of scrutiny exercises by the board, but as yet has not highlighted effectively the factors that have held back progress. The board has focused on linking the respective priorities of partner agencies, but this has not provided the necessary challenge and focus. The engagement of agencies in the common assessment framework process is weak, with no professionals from any agency other than the local authority currently undertaking the lead professional role with families. The LSCB has not sufficiently challenged partner agencies, such as health and schools, about this shortfall. (Recommendation)
100. The threshold document has been subject to two revisions in the past year following learning from the board's section 47 and MASH audits. It requires further modification, as it lacks sufficient clarity about key service pathways, such as those for children at risk of sexual exploitation, and does not provide guidance about the thresholds for voluntary accommodation or care proceedings, under sections 20 and 31 of the Children Act 1989, as required by statutory guidance. It also contains some language that is unclear or confusing for professionals using the document as a guide to decision making. (Recommendation)
101. The board has been effective in promoting awareness of child sexual exploitation among young people, having supported the delivery of 'Chelsea's Choice' across Harrow to 16 schools. The board has overseen and been influential in ensuring an appropriate local response to the 'Prevent' duty and female genital mutilation. This includes ensuring the provision of training and awareness raising, and supporting some innovative projects such as the 'Pants' video. This initiative is an example of good practice.
102. The LSCB undertakes annual section 11 audits of partners' effectiveness in carrying out their safeguarding responsibilities. These have been jointly completed with a neighbouring authority, enabling efficiencies. All statutory partners complete this audit, but less than 50% of schools do so. There is evidence that more schools are now engaging positively with the board following the setting up of a safeguarding in education termly seminar group, led by the board business manager. The seminar group has addressed such issues as bullying, female genital mutilation and the role of the MASH. To date, 55 out of a possible 60 schools and colleges are reported as attending this group, and teaching staff spoke positively regarding the initiative.
103. The board recognises that its current structure of six sub-groups requires revision. Not all sub-groups have sufficient capacity or the active engagement

of all partners, so cannot fully achieve their planned work. The minutes of some sub-groups do not provide a concise record of activity. This has been recognised. When sub-groups have been working effectively, such as the quality assurance sub-group, there are measurable improvements in practice. The multi-agency audits undertaken are focused on relevant issues of concern, and lead to clear action plans and evidence of improvement, for example the recent audit of services for disabled children. Positively, the practice of this sub-group is that audit activity continues until measurable improvements have been seen in practice. A good example is the audits carried out of the section 47 process, which led to tangible improvements in the quality and impact of practice with children at risk of significant harm. (Recommendation)

104. The child death overview panel (CDOP) is effective in analysing local information on child deaths, identifying patterns and trends. None of the small number of deaths during the past year were linked to safeguarding issues or concerns about professional practice, so were not referred to the board. There are plans in place to improve the CDOP annual report by linking findings to the wider population in order to improve the quality of the information provided. The CDOP has developed and rolled out good awareness-raising programmes linked to the use of baby slings, safer sleeping, smoking cessation and the availability of support for bereaved parents. Harrow has high rates of breastfeeding, and the CDOP challenged the council successfully when there was a proposed plan to cut funding to a successful peer breastfeeding programme.
105. Processes for making decisions about and undertaking SCRs or management reviews are clearly set out in the terms of reference of the SCR sub-group and are well established. This group also monitors and challenges the progress of SCR action plans. The board has been undertaking work relating to three SCRs in the past year, as well as multi-agency learning reviews of children's cases that do not meet the criteria for an SCR. A programme of training sessions ensures that lessons learned are cascaded out by all agencies quickly via e-bulletins, training events, sub-group members and the children's services management team. This sub-group holds agencies to account effectively in implementing recommendations.
106. The quality assurance sub-group is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including analysis of data sets and coordinating the six-monthly multi-agency case audits. These case audits are an effective mechanism for increasing understanding of the quality of frontline practice and identifying areas for improvement. This has enabled the board to identify a number of priorities and put action plans in place to further strengthen practice.
107. The child sexual exploitation sub-group has a wide work programme following the areas identified for improvement by the second child sexual exploitation review in spring 2016. There are some key improvements which the sub-group is progressing, such as awareness-raising activity with staff in sexual

health clinics. Areas for development include evidence of challenge. For example, there is lack of analysis of return home interviews. The return home interviews are frequently a verbatim account of the young person's words, instead of an analysis of the push and pull factors or the cumulative risk of multiple 'missing' episodes.

108. Social workers and foster carers who spoke to inspectors value the multi-agency training provided by the board. Training activity has increased significantly, with 1,702 sessions delivered in 2015–16 against 1,194 in 2014–15. The creation of 60 child sexual exploitation champions, who have been trained to cascade face-to-face courses within partnership agencies, has been effective. This means that all partner agencies are supported to share good practice within their workforce. Some training sessions for local GPs have been specifically designed and led by the general practitioner who sits on the board. All training is evaluated, but the low feedback response on individuals' practice three months after training hampers the evaluation in its effectiveness. Training is responsive to changing need, as it combines learning from the LSCB's own audits and SCRs, as well as nationally published SCRs and research findings, into current training programmes. A small community organisation is commissioned to deliver training to a large number of voluntary and faith organisations. This is ensuring that safeguarding issues are far better understood. An increasing number of the organisations that have attended these sessions have nominated a designated safeguarding lead for their organisation.
109. The board has an accessible and informative website with links to relevant good-quality information about a range of safeguarding issues. A focus group of children looked after was involved in its development and one young person was directly involved in the design. It includes helpful information on SCRs. The LSCB produced an 'outstandingly good' cartoon, in the words of a child living in a family of neglectful and abusive parents. This is used routinely in induction and other training. It has a useful site for young people that includes information on the NSPCC 'Pants' campaign, female genital mutilation, bullying, child sexual exploitation and 'what to do if you are worried'. The website also holds the pan-London LSCB policies and procedures, which the board has adopted.
110. Young people have recently been involved in presenting a session at the board's annual conference, and in a series of positive and effective sessions undertaken with other young people seeking their views on safety in Harrow. However, children and young people are not routinely or sufficiently engaged in the quality assurance and priority-setting work of the board (Recommendation)
111. The LSCB annual report 2015–16 is a comprehensive document. It is detailed as a record of performance, but it is not sufficiently rigorous in its analysis. It has helpful summary key findings and some suggestions on what needs to be focused on in the future. The business plan is linked to the annual report, but

it lacks a sharpness and a framework to measure impact. The business plan priorities are too broad and lack specificity, so cannot be readily achievable or measurable. As a result of this, the business plan is not a sufficiently effective tool for the board to understand whether it is making a positive difference for children and young people. Overall, there is a lack of alignment between the business plan, the challenge log and action plans. These all need to be kept up to date so that board members always have a clear understanding of the board's position, and can measure impact and ensure sufficient challenge.
(Recommendation)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the local safeguarding children board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one Social Care Regulatory Inspector from Ofsted.

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