

London Borough of Havering

Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 11 June 2018 to 22 June 2018

Lead inspector: Andy Whippey, HMI

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

Services for children in Havering have significantly improved since the previous inspection in 2016. Leaders have demonstrated a determination to improve outcomes for children and this has been supported by purposeful corporate investment and commitment. Leaders know their services well and are appropriately acting on the areas for development of the service noted by inspectors.

Substantive improvements have been made in the provision of services for children who need help and protection, particularly in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Improvements to the quality and timeliness of assessments are also clear to see. The quality of strategy meetings remains too variable and the identification of risks relating to some young people who are missing or at risk of exploitation is insufficiently robust.

Good and effective support for children in care ensures that their outcomes improve. Health and education needs are well understood and appropriately

prioritised for these children. The overwhelming majority of children in long-term foster care live in stable homes and make good progress. Services for care leavers have improved significantly since the last inspection. Most care leavers receive a good level of support and live in accommodation appropriate to their needs.

What needs to improve

- The quality of management oversight of social work practice, including supervision and the use of qualitative auditing to give a better understanding of the impact of practice.
- The quality of strategy discussions, core groups and children in need planning meetings, so that all relevant partner information is included to inform decision-making. Actions should be clear and the rationale for decisions should be explicit.
- Planned support for children returning home from care.
- The quality of children's plans so they are explicit about desired outcomes, the means by which these outcomes will be achieved and the timescales for completion.
- The consistency and quality of response to and interventions with vulnerable children at risk of child sexual exploitation, of involvement in gang-related activity or of going missing.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection requires improvement

1. Children and families increasingly benefit from a good range of early help services. The creation of community-based collaborative services involving partners has strengthened this provision. Thresholds for early help are mostly appropriate. Action plans are clearly linked to assessments and most interventions lead to positive outcomes for children and young people. In a minority of cases, some children experience a delay in being provided with a service.
2. When children's needs change and risks to their welfare increase, partners make appropriate referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). This escalation is timely and ensures that children receive more specialist support when needed. Social workers make appropriate decisions about the level of intervention required to protect children. Initial decision-making is timely, with a clearly recorded rationale. Information sharing and communication between partners help to identify changing levels of risk to children. Identification of children in need of urgent help and protection is recognised quickly. Multi-agency responses to information requests on referrals are monitored effectively by a red, amber, green (RAG) rating system.
3. Children receive appropriate support and interventions from the out-of- hour's emergency duty team. Subsequent daily handover meetings ensures good communication and an effective response for children.
4. Social workers know their children well and visit them within timescales consistent with the children's needs. Social workers are tenacious in the work that they do with children to enable them to gain an insight into their lives. The timeliness of assessments has improved, and most are of a good quality. This is leading to earlier and more effective interventions. The majority of assessments include succinct analysis informed by information gathered during the assessment process. The views of children and families are well evidenced. This enables social workers and managers to make appropriate decisions regarding the support that children and families need. In the vast majority of cases, children are seen quickly, and consistent with their needs. In a small minority of cases, delays in children being seen means that their circumstances are not being assessed quickly enough.
5. When children are at risk of immediate harm, prompt action is taken to understand their circumstance and to protect them. Strategy discussions and meetings make the right decisions for children, but do not always include all the relevant professionals. The rationale for outcomes and decisions in many

is insufficiently clear in the record of meetings. In some cases, review strategy meetings are not held to review progress.

6. Most child protection enquiries, initial child protection conferences and subsequent reviews are timely. However, the quality of child protection and child in need plans is variable and some are weak. They do not always enable children and families to understand what is expected of them, what needs to change, and by when. They are not consistently updated to reflect children's current circumstances. Contingency plans are not always explicit. While core groups and child in need meetings are consistently held, the lack of clarity in some plans makes it difficult to ensure that progress is being made and that risks are reducing.
7. When increasing risks to children are identified, there is increasing use of the public law outline (PLO). Legal planning meetings demonstrate a comprehensive discussion of risks with appropriate legal advice and clarity of actions. Social workers in the majority of cases ensure that families understand the nature of risks to children and know what they need to do to minimise and reduce these concerns. In a minority of cases, there is a recognised need to improve the clarity of letters to families to enhance their understanding of these risks. Managers acknowledge that there is further work to do to develop the PLO and care proceedings tracker, in order to monitor progress against actions from legal planning meetings to prevent any delays in planning for children.
8. When children in need, including those in need of protection, are identified as being at increased risk or need, they are mostly appropriately 'stepped up' to receive a higher level of intervention. In a small number of cases, inspectors saw a lack of clarity between the child protection and child in need threshold. Decisions to 'step down' are mostly appropriate, and based on changes for the child rather than perceptions of improved compliance.
9. The quality of help and protection offered to children by the disabled children's team is a strength. Workers are skilled and know the children they are working with well. Assessments are updated regularly and provide good evaluation of the needs of children. Visits to children are regular and purposeful.
10. The numbers of children and young people at risk of radicalisation are low. When risks to children are identified, clear assessments that identify needs and vulnerabilities are undertaken. A 'Prevent' action plan clearly defines agencies' responsibilities. Safeguarding and multi-agency working is effective for these young people and their families.

11. Risks to children and young people in danger of going missing, child sexual exploitation or involvement in gang-related activities are not consistently well recognised or responded to. While the appointment of a child sexual exploitation and missing coordinator is helping to improve the standard of practice, there is still inconsistency. Child sexual exploitation risk assessments are undertaken when risks are identified. However, there is inconsistency as to when these assessments are reviewed in order to re-evaluate risk factors. The number of return home interviews being completed has increased. However, there is more to do, particularly regarding the number of interviews completed within 72 hours of a young person returning home, in order to ensure that information relevant to the young person is not lost. When completed interviews have insufficient analysis, it is not clear how information from these interviews is being used to inform planning for young people. Inspectors saw some positive examples of child protection processes being used to help manage risks for some young people. However, while strategy meetings were convened in relation to the management of risk, this was not consistent and review risk management meetings were not always held in order to review progress and consider current levels of risk.
12. Management oversight of front-line practice is not consistently effective. While the vast majority of social workers receive regular supervision, it is often too focused on compliance with timescales and not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. While the influence of child protection conference chairs is more evident, there is still inconsistency in their impact on the quality of plans and the effectiveness of core groups.
13. When children are missing from education, all reasonable checks are made to help to track and identify their whereabouts, including home visits. Staff and the children missing education officer work closely with the police, schools and other local authorities. Agencies are persistent in their efforts to identify children missing education.
14. The local authority has experienced a significant rise in the numbers of children educated at home in the past two years and has a good understanding of these cohorts of children. Staff meet with families to gain a better understanding of their choice, explain their entitlements as home educators and explore the range of options that best meet their child's needs.

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

15. The local authority makes concerted efforts to ensure that children remain with their families when this is safe for them. In the majority of cases, decisions that children should come into care are made within a timescale that meets the child's needs. When children need to become looked after, they receive effective and sensitive intervention. This includes unaccompanied

asylum-seeking children, who receive a strong, supportive and quick response to meet their needs. Children's needs are understood well. Thresholds for care proceedings are applied correctly, assessments and statements to court are of good quality and care plans are clear. The use of parental agreement to accommodation is appropriately sought.

16. The response to children who return home, including those under 'placement with parents regulations', is inconsistent. Clear assessments in relation to decision-making are not consistently evident and in some cases do not describe the level of support children and families require to facilitate and sustain such a plan.
17. The majority of children have the benefit of timely and well-considered options for permanence. Permanence planning meetings are held to track progress but are not consistently recorded on children's records or consistently specific in relation to actions agreed.
18. Once a decision has been taken that adoption is the right plan for children, permanence planning is effective. Good liaison between social workers and the adoption team ensures early family finding. There is a strong focus on achieving adoption in a timely manner for those children with a plan for adoption. Early permanence via foster to adopt is considered, but such arrangements are underdeveloped and there are no current carers approved for such a match. Managers have recognised the need to ensure foster to adopt is more firmly embedded in social work practice.
19. Children are well matched with adopters and sensitive preparation of children with careful introductions contributes to the sustainability of adoptive families. The agency decision-maker and adoption panel chair provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge. Adoption support plans are effective in providing individualised support, both for adoptive parents and children.
20. Children receive regular visits from their social workers. Social workers and managers know them well and can talk about them as unique individuals. In many cases, direct work is undertaken to help children understand their histories and experiences. This purposeful direct work helps to inform their care planning. There is increasing use of independent visitors and advocates particularly to support children living out of area. Social workers and foster carers are positive about and ambitious for children and support them in their interests.
21. The vast majority of children in care live in stable placements with their brothers and sisters that meet their needs effectively and improves their outcomes. This includes children in specialist provision and those in out-of-area placements. Good preventive support is provided if disruption is anticipated. Any decisions to use residential placements are well considered, and placement planning ensures that children's homes are able to meet the

unique needs of children. Almost all children in care have good access to primary health services and have access to a good range of commissioned therapeutic and specialist services to support their emotional health and well-being. Increased use of strengths and difficulties questionnaires helps social workers and foster carers have a better understanding of children's support needs.

22. The virtual school maintains effective oversight of the educational progress of children in care, with a greater focus on more vulnerable pupils. The majority of children have an up-to-date personal education plan, although the plans are not consistently good enough to support thorough educational planning. Effective use is made of the pupil premium to support children's educational and emotional health needs. Many children make good progress from their starting points and benefit from well-tailored support that meets their individual needs. The progress of the small number of children in alternative provision is closely monitored. Positive work with schools has helped to avoid children being excluded, including helping school staff develop appropriate strategies.
23. The achievements of children in care are regularly celebrated through the annual awards ceremony and through 'well done' letters and the awarding of gift vouchers. A good range of enrichment activities are in place and promoted well, for example educational workshops, additional tutoring, theatre and museum trips. An ambitious trip to India is taking place later this year, when a number of children in care will teach English to children there.
24. When children enter care, effective commissioning arrangements ensure that, wherever possible, stable and high-quality placements are available. The clear majority of children and young people live with foster families. An increasing number are 'in house' because of successful recruitment activity. Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved in most cases within appropriate timescales. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical, and consideration is given to the impact of fostering on the whole fostering family. Connected persons assessments take account of both the potential carers' histories and the needs of children to be placed. Foster carers have good access to regular training and support, which they report that they value.
25. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) provide consistent and effective oversight of children's plans. Inspectors found consistent examples of IROs visiting children in between the reviews of their care plan and undertaking midpoint reviews to ensure that actions from reviews are acted upon. IROs listen to children and ensure that their wishes and feelings are acted on in reviews. The need for children to see family members and others important to them is well considered in care plans and changed in recognition of children's changed needs. Social work reports for reviews are clear and in most cases evidence how well social workers know children. Children are positively encouraged to participate in their reviews. The quality of reviews is

consistently good, with plans identified to help improve outcomes for children. Increasing use of the mind of my own (MOMO) app is enabling children to have an increasing voice in influencing plans for them.

26. Services for care leavers have improved significantly since the last inspection, when the service was judged to be inadequate. There have been improvements to varying degrees in all of the areas of weakness previously identified. Pathway planning has improved, although not all pathway plans are being reviewed within timescales or in response to young people's changing circumstances. The quality of pathway plans overall has improved, although there is a need for some to be more specific about how young people's needs will be met. The local authority has recognised the need to ensure that young people are more consistently involved in such planning.
27. The vast majority of young people leaving care benefit from a good range of accommodation. There is a range of suitable accommodation available and all young people spoken to said that they were in safe and appropriate homes. There are a high number of care leavers in staying put arrangements. Young people are being better prepared for independence and are not moving into independent accommodation until they have the skills to successfully manage this transition.
28. The range and depth of support available to care leavers at the Cocoon, a one stop shop for care leavers, is highly impressive. A number of partners very effectively provide an umbrella of support, including help with education, employment advice, emotional health support and access to physical health provision and housing. In addition, care leavers can access cooking and washing facilities, which enhances the support offered. The service is highly valued by care leavers and has undoubtedly been of benefit in improving outcomes for many of them. Most care leavers are well supported by their workers and the service is in touch with virtually all of them. One young person described their experience thus: 'Workers have helped improve my life. The workers here work with me, not to me. It's like having a massive family who care.'
29. The health needs of care leavers are well identified and provided for. Care leavers don't have access to their health histories and this impacts on their understanding of their histories and their ability to make informed decisions about their health.

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

30. Leaders in Havering have made significant progress in improving the quality of services for children since the previous inspection in 2016. A determination to strive for improvement and an openness to learning have been pivotal in driving such improvements. In all service areas, inspectors have found improvements since 2016. The experience of care leavers was identified as the weakest aspect of service at the last inspection, and since then, there has been a substantive increase in the quality of provision to these young people.
31. The senior management team has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for further developments of frontline practice. They understand the challenges they face and have put in place appropriate plans to address these, informed by a thorough and accurate self-evaluation. Senior leaders are highly committed, active and visible. They understand the scale of the challenges that they and their staff face and are realistic about strengths and areas for development. The need to improve the quality of key areas of activity, such as the quality of children's plans, is recognised. Regular face-to-face meetings between the chief executive, the director of children's services and elected members are informed by relevant, up-to-date performance information. This facilitates shared responsibility and accountability for the key challenges for children's social care.
32. Areas requiring improvement in practice identified during this inspection have been responded to positively by leaders. Immediate arrangements have been put in place to strengthen the chairing of strategy meetings. Audit activity will also more keenly focus on examining the timeliness and quality of these meetings.
33. Frontline managers are not consistently sufficiently rigorous or challenging in monitoring and driving social work practice to ensure that services are consistently good. Supervision is routinely taking place and, in some cases, provides good reflection and direction, but this is not consistent. Too often it is not providing sufficient clarity as to actions necessary to improve outcomes for children. The local authority recognises the need to further develop management capacity in order to ensure that it is consistently delivering clear reflective and directive supervision that impacts on social work practice.
34. Opportunities for workforce learning are well established and influence how services are developed. Learning from peer reviews and serious case reviews is established and well publicised to help inform current social work practice.
35. Clear arrangements are in place to ensure that children in care live in regularly quality-assured homes. Regular meetings with providers help to raise standards and address any areas of concern. The sufficiency strategy is robust and there is a good awareness of any gaps in provision. The innovative

residential project and a determined focus on fostering recruitment is impacting positively. The number of children placed in private, voluntary or out-of-locality provision is decreasing.

36. Increasing use is being made of performance management systems with a wide range of relevant data being captured across the organisation. This data ensures that senior leaders have an oversight of the timeliness of key frontline practice indicators. Performance reports clearly identify any unexpected changes in performance. They are not yet sufficiently explicit in identifying the proposed remedial actions to address identified deficits and have a greater focus on the quality of key activities. The local authority has acted to address the issues it has experienced with performance reporting and has commissioned a new children's recording system.
37. The experiences of children are not yet systematically captured through case file audits. Auditing of case files, including involving senior managers, is now more frequent. However, the auditing is overly focused on checking the completion of events rather than the qualitative experiences of children in order to understand what is making a positive difference, and informing the development and improvement of services. The volume of auditing, although much improved, is not consistently leading to positive change. It is not yet driving improvements required in case recording or supervision records. Audits do not sufficiently identify for social workers and managers what constitutes good practice, thus making it more difficult from them to learn from audits and replicate good practice in the future.
38. Corporate parenting has shown clear improvements since the last inspection. Commissioning and regeneration initiatives have been effectively used to create apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers. A number of young people have been supported to remain with their foster carers up to age 21, giving them the stability to transition into adulthood. Consistent efforts have been made to engage with older children and young people, facilitated by the highly impressive facilities at the Cocoon and the youth management team. There is more to be done to ensure that the corporate parenting board is challenging in a consistent way and that board members are aware of and are acting on the views of younger children.
39. A joined-up approach to recruitment, retention and development is having a positive impact in terms of making Havering local authority a more attractive place to work. Senior leaders understand the importance of having a sufficiently skilled and stable workforce in order to drive improvement. They have invested financially and in management time and focus to give this area an impetus. Positive impacts have been seen in terms of the reduced reliance on agency staff and staff turnover. There is a clear and comprehensive workforce development strategy, and all staff are given the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and careers. The development of the Havering social work academy and the introduction of formalised systemic training is

valued by social workers for the opportunities it gives to develop their practice. Social workers are positive about working in Havering. Overall caseloads are manageable, although they are too high for a small number of experienced social workers. The vulnerabilities of this situation are recognised by the authority and there are plans in place to address them.



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