

London Borough of Camden

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 date: 11 September 2017 to 5 October 2017

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

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

Leaders and managers in Camden think deeply and creatively about how to continually improve the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families while ensuring effectively that children at risk are safeguarded. They do this through thoughtful, highly evolved strategic partnerships that lead to effective and innovative integrated services. Children and families receive good services across the entire spectrum, from early help through to adoption and leaving care. The local authority successfully helps a large number of families at an early stage of their difficulties, safely reducing the need for many families to receive subsequent statutory involvements. Children's experiences of daily life are carefully portrayed through strong direct work, ensuring that their voices are prominent and are not overshadowed by the complex needs of their adult carers. A small number of children become looked after too late, when intensive support has not improved their circumstances. Senior managers plan to address this through a recent successful innovation bid.

Children's and young people's participation in and influence of service development are deeply ingrained. The young inspector's programme, Children in Care Council (CiCC) and other forums demonstrate important improvements and changes to services, directly attributable to young people's proposals, supported by a highly committed participation worker.

The director of children's services (DCS) and the leadership team have formed a dynamic, professionally fertile environment for social workers at all levels of experience to engage with children and families. A learning culture is well supported by the use of a systemic model of practice. This enables social workers and other frontline workers to gradually increase their skills and knowledge through a continuous training and development framework. Social workers enjoy working in Camden and benefit from manageable caseloads and analytical, reflective group supervision. This is underpinned by systemically trained senior practitioners, working cohesively with highly skilled child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) staff who are integrally located across frontline services. This allows social workers to explore and implement imaginative and bold approaches to assess and support families. The widespread use of family group conferences is central to a highly participative approach to engaging families, enabling the recovery of fragmented, damaged relationships and building resilience in families, and this is at the heart of the Camden model of social work.

Comprehensive, integrated early help and family support services provide families with an accessible range of universal, targeted and specialist services. These are strengthened by close partnerships with schools and health, alongside a range of needs-led commissioned services. Thresholds for services are understood and supported by consistent decision-making in an effective multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). This enables swift access to early help services and prompt responses to safeguarding concerns.

Children who go missing and are, or are likely to be, at risk of sexual exploitation, serious youth violence or gang affiliation are protected through highly effective multi-agency strategic arrangements. This results in flexible, nimble operational frontline responses. Intelligence is quickly gathered and analysed, and the information is shared across a broad spectrum of services. There is extensive awareness of multiple and overlapping risks to all children, including domestic abuse, radicalisation, online grooming and 'county lines' drug running. Multi-agency panels stringently evaluate and track the progress of interventions. The multi-agency public protection panel (MAPPA) and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) are both effective, though not all recommendations transfer to children's records.

The positive influence of the systemic approach is evident in consistently child-centred, comprehensive and analytical assessments. Most child protection and children in need plans are outcome focused, with specific and measurable goals, but the review of previous actions and timescales is not always thorough for some children.

Children who become looked after in Camden are considerably older, on average, than elsewhere. This means that their needs as teenagers are particularly complex, creating additional challenges in finding suitable placements. Nevertheless, careful planning is evident in finding the right placements, resulting in relatively few unplanned placement moves. The use of the Public Law Outline and the subsequent care order applications demonstrate timely and coherent preparation of evidence that is well regarded by the family court. Detailed assessments inform return home plans, meaning that very few children experience the instability of repeat episodes in care. Advocacy and independent visitor services for children looked after require strengthening, and initial health assessments for some children take too long. The services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the large number of refugee families that are hosted by Camden are of the highest calibre.

Most relevant children are provided with permanent placements promptly, and these children are closely tracked, including those awaiting an adoptive placement. Adoption performance is outstanding, although further work is required to establish 'foster to adopt' placements in planning and practice.

Services to care leavers are good. They live in safe, good-quality accommodation and value highly the support from their social workers and personal advisers. They are well supported towards independent living and to engage in education, employment and training. A significant percentage of care leavers attend university.

The quality of frontline practice is regularly assured by established auditing work, leading to targeted learning and improvement. This work is led by a longstanding and highly skilled principal social worker. The detail of case recording and management oversight does not always capture the frequent reflective discussions and high-quality direct work, but social workers prioritise contact time with families. More narrative analysis of data and regular monitoring of the timeliness of visits to children would further enhance the analysis of trends in an effective performance framework.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority does not operate any children's homes.
- The last inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in April 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The last inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in April 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since February 2014.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services and housing support.
- The chief executive has been in post since January 2012.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board has been in post since January 2011.
- The local authority uses a systemic model of social work.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 48,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Camden. This is 19% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 31% of the local authority's children are living in low income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 27% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 26% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 50% 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 Asian or Asian British (18%) and Black or Black British (15%).
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 61% (the national average is 20%)

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.

- in secondary schools is 51% (the national average is 16%). (Source: LAIS)

Child protection in this area

- At 11 September 2017, 1,716 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a slight reduction from 1,756 at 31 March 2017.
- At 11 September 2017, 248 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 52 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 255 (55 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 11 September 2017, no children were living in a privately arranged fostering placement.
- In the two years before the inspection, four serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and no serious case reviews have been undertaken.
- There are two serious case reviews ongoing at the time of this inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 11 September 2017, 194 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 41 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 200 (42 per 10,000 children) at March 31 2017. Of this number:
 - 108 (or 56%) live outside the local authority area
 - 29 live in residential children's homes, of whom 41% live out of the authority area
 - five live in residential special schools,³ all of whom live out of the authority area
 - 110 live with foster families, of whom 74% live out of the authority area
 - five live with parents
 - 43 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been nine adoptions
 - nine children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 97 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 2% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation.

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

Recommendations

1. The local authority should carefully and continually evaluate whether service provision for a small minority of children receiving statutory social work support is improving their adverse circumstances and reducing risks sufficiently quickly. Decisive management steps to consider the issue of care proceedings should be taken, where this is not demonstrated.
2. Ensure that records of frontline management oversight and case directions are timely and of a consistently high quality.
3. Ensure that performance information includes regular monitoring of the timeliness of visits to children who are the subject of early help referrals and child in need plans.
4. Ensure that children, including those who are looked after, and their parents who receive social work services are able to readily access independent advocacy support.
5. Ensure that all children who are looked after have the opportunity to access an independent visitor if they wish.
6. Ensure that managers and social workers prioritise conducting initial health assessments for children who become looked after, so that children's health needs are understood and addressed at an earlier stage.
7. Ensure that all care leavers are clear about their own health histories, and are also aware of any family health issues that may affect them as they go through life.
8. Strengthen communication between the multi-agency public protection panel (MAPPA) and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) and social work teams, to ensure that relevant recommendations and actions from the panels are recorded and pursued.

Summary for children and young people

- Children and their families are helped before problems become too bad, through very good early help services.
- For a small number of children, the help that is provided does not always resolve their family difficulties, and the local authority waits too long to take them into care.
- A number of agencies and services in Camden, led by the local authority and the police, work really well together to protect children from harm. This includes complicated risks such as gangs, knife crime, drugs and sexual exploitation.
- Social workers have time to spend with children. They do some very good work with children to understand their lives, and with their parents and carers to help to improve things at home. This allows children to focus on school, to enjoy their lives at home and to feel safe.
- The work of the Children in Care Council and young inspectors is very good, and this has changed the way that some things are done. Managers in Camden work really hard to listen to and involve children in decisions about them.
- The local authority should provide more independent help and advice for the children whom they look after to improve this work even more.
- Managers have worked well to reduce the number of changes in social workers that children have. Social workers in Camden are highly qualified, experienced, very well trained and supported. This attracts good social workers who want to work there, meaning that children and families receive highly skilled help.
- Camden has very good services for the large number of refugee families that it supports and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This means that they are given the right support not just when they arrive but for a long time afterwards, until they feel more settled and comfortable.
- Camden pays close attention to older children needing help, including care leavers, disabled young people and those with mental health problems, before they reach their 18th birthdays. This means that young people continue to receive effective help after they turn 18.
- Senior managers know what they need to do to help more children and their families, and they do this through careful research and planning. This means that the help provided is continually improving and uses the best evidence of what works well.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children in Camden have easy access to good-quality universal and targeted services. These services are strengthened by effective partnerships, enabling children to quickly receive the right services to meet their needs, avoiding an escalation of difficulties from early help to statutory services.</p> <p>The MASH responds effectively to all contacts and referrals. Actions taken to safeguard children are timely and appropriate. Children are regularly seen by social workers, who consistently try to come to know them well. Some non-urgent visits to children do not always take place within the local authority’s expected timescales.</p> <p>Assessments, including early help assessments and plans, are comprehensive and capture children’s views well, leading to effective help and support. Direct work with children is thoughtful, using a range of tools and methods. This ensures that their views are clearly evident in assessments and plans.</p> <p>Disabled children and those with complex health needs are well supported, alongside their brothers and sisters, through high-quality services. Effective social work practice is fortified by increasingly integrated partnership working. Tenacious collaborative work ensures that children are safeguarded, when necessary, and the quality of their lives improved.</p> <p>Highly developed partnership working enables children who are subjects of child in need or child protection plans to obtain help and support from schools, health services and other professionals. Some child in need and core group meetings do not always take place at the required frequency, meaning that the progress of agreed actions for these children can be unclear. Independent advocacy support is not used often enough to support children or parents in meetings.</p> <p>Children who go missing and are exposed to risks of child sexual exploitation receive highly effective responses. Social workers make determined efforts to engage and build positive relationships with them. A continuum of multi-agency interventions and services actively engages with and addresses risks for these children and their families, including those at risk of gang affiliation.</p> <p>The multi-agency public protection panel (MAPPA) and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) multi-agency forums are used effectively to discuss risks to children. Recommendations do not always transfer to children’s records, although this does not delay implementation.</p>	

Management direction and social work intervention for children is effective. However, the reasons for decisions and challenge regarding incomplete work are not always recorded in case files to provide a clear audit trail of decision-making.

Inspection findings

9. Vulnerable children and families in Camden benefit from a broad spectrum of services that offer a diverse network of help and support, improving their circumstances. Highly developed partnership arrangements and shared priorities enable children and their families to access 'the right help at the right time'. The local authority's enhanced universal services offer, prominently featuring schools and health services, supports children effectively within their own families and networks. When more help is required, an extensive range of early help and family support services complement and broaden the provision of universal services. Consequently, many children's circumstances improve, avoiding the need for statutory interventions.
10. An integrated MASH provides an accessible 'front door' to all requests for help and support from families and partners. The service facilitates families and professionals to make referrals, reflecting the council's 'no wrong door' principle. Referrals for early help and targeted support receive the same level of attention and management oversight as referrals for safeguarding services. This ensures early and easy access for children and their families to the right level of support.
11. Partners complete common assessment framework (CAFs) and e-CAF documentation to make referrals requesting services for children to the MASH. Those that result in early help assessments undertaken by the early help and family support teams are of a high quality. These assessments are comprehensive, focusing on the needs of each individual child, while capturing the circumstances of the whole family. Children's views are clearly evident, providing important insights into their lived experiences, strengths and worries. This enables professionals to tailor and provide support services that address children's needs. Despite the high quality of these early help assessments, children are not always seen quickly enough. In a limited number of cases, there are delays in commencing assessments. While some assessments take too long to complete, help for children and their families is not delayed.
12. Workers in the MASH ensure timely and proportionate responses to risk and children's identified needs. Thresholds for intervention are balanced and well understood by partners. If professionals are unclear about the appropriateness of potential referrals, they can access helpful telephone advice from qualified social workers in the MASH. Social workers carefully consider parental consent in their initial management of referrals, unless there are overriding safeguarding issues. Well-established integrated partnerships in

the MASH cohesively manage risks, ensuring that action is quickly taken to safeguard and protect children. Management oversight in the MASH is highly visible, and decisions are based on careful consideration of all available information, ensuring that children's immediate safety is prioritised. Management decisions are clearly recorded in case records.

13. Experienced, highly qualified emergency duty social work practitioners provide an effective, responsive out-of-hours service for children, adults and families. They respond quickly to emergencies, liaising effectively with other out-of-hours services. Children's case records clearly reflect the involvement of the emergency duty team, and follow-up actions are responded to appropriately in the MASH or social work teams on the next working day.
14. Children who require immediate protection receive urgent attention. Strategy discussions are held promptly, usually within hours of a referral, but these are largely telephone discussions. Review strategy meetings are often convened, involving the wider partnership and enabling a fuller review of the risks and follow up of actions from the initial telephone discussion. Decisions to start child protection enquiries are proportionate, and social workers are immediately allocated to see children quickly.
15. Most children's social work assessments are timely, comprehensive and analytical. They incorporate family histories and consider cultural and diversity issues, leading to focused help and interventions. Children are the primary focus of assessments, and careful direct work clearly identifies their experiences and views. Respectful and sensitive relationships with parents, including fathers, enable social workers to write rounded assessments, which may include dissenting views, while remaining child focused. Decisions made following assessments, either to escalate from child in need plans to initial child protection conferences or to step down to early help services, are balanced and appropriate. However, while management directions are soundly based, the supporting rationale for decisions is not always clearly evident in children's case records.
16. Social workers conduct initial urgent visits to see children. Less urgent visits, for some children, do not consistently meet the local authority expected timescales. While this does not have a negative impact on progressing children's assessments, managers are closely monitoring performance, and signs of improvement are emerging.
17. The co-location and increasing integration of services with health and CAMHS further strengthen the effectiveness of social work responses to disabled children and young people. The needs of their brothers and sisters are also capably considered. Comprehensive, tripartite-funded support arrangements provide flexible packages of care to meet complex needs, improving the quality of children's lives. Social work is of a consistently high standard, fully meeting relevant responsibilities and requirements, whether disabled children

are supported under early help, child in need, child protection or looked after children arrangements. Social workers actively advocate on children's behalf, making determined efforts to understand the experiences of children who have limited or no verbal communication. Services support disabled young people up to the age of 25 years, and are highly effective in ensuring that transitions to adult services take place at a time that is right for the individual young people.

18. Child protection conferences are well managed, and are well attended by most partner agencies. Conference chairs are considerate and careful in supporting children and parents attending the meetings, helping them to participate more widely and understand the process. A visual tool used during conferences helps families to understand the developing analysis of strengths, risks, grey areas and decision-making. Decisions made in child protection conferences are well considered, and the chairs ensure that professionals are fully engaged in forming or reviewing protection plans. Not all child protection review conferences consistently evaluate whether children's plans are having sufficient impact on improving their circumstances. In a few conferences, there was little evidence of challenge when the work stipulated in the plans was not completed. This means that there is slower progress in improving the circumstances of children who have been on child protection plans for over a year.
19. The majority of plans to support children under child protection and child in need arrangements are of a good quality. Most focus appropriately on the needs of children, demonstrating determined efforts to involve absent or non-resident fathers. Strong partnership engagement in plans is evident, and families are offered support and challenge by a large range of targeted family support services. Family group conferences (FGC) are used extensively and skilfully, complementing plans and drawing in support for children and their carers from their extended family, friendship and community networks. An increasingly restorative approach is evident in these meetings, repairing damaged or fractured relationships, thereby adding resilience to struggling families. 'Dove' FGCs are being introduced to support children living in families where there has been domestic abuse. This has resulted in no domestic abuse incidents recurring following these restorative meetings.
20. Children benefit from initial child in need meetings, chaired by an independent reviewing officer or senior practitioner, to help to develop their plans and provide additional management oversight. However, the timescales of some actions are too vague, and their follow up at subsequent child in need and child protection core group meetings is not always clearly evident as minutes are not consistently uploaded to children's records. When plans are not working effectively or change is not happening quickly enough for children, 'thinking together' meetings are used to consider alternative plans to meet children's needs.

21. Children and parents are supported to give their views throughout the child protection process, and a few have the benefit of advocacy support. However, advocacy support for parents and children subject to child protection plans is underdeveloped and not all families have the opportunity to benefit from this service. Too few children under 16 years of age take up the support service offered by the council.
22. Social workers are proactive, alongside a range of other partner agencies, in responding to risks to children arising as a result of domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse within households. Social workers work hard to understand children's experiences and to assess the impact of their parents' or other adults' behaviours. Proportionate action is taken to manage and reduce risks. An extensive range of community support services, including adult services, address parental behaviours, illnesses and addictions. This allows many children to live safer and more fulfilling lives in their family homes.
23. Common associations and factors seen across gang memberships, drug misuse, radicalisation, serious youth violence, and child sexual exploitation and going missing are understood well in a constructive, multi-agency environment. Emerging information and intelligence is continually and quickly evaluated. Partners, led by the expertise and guidance of the police and local authority, recognise that the victim and offender status of these young people are often entwined. This mature approach has led to the development of a continuum of multi-agency interventions, adapted to and targeted at the particular profiles and risks of young people identified, and extends to effective cross-borough coordination of intelligence. Child sexual exploitation screening tools are used effectively and risks are recognised. Strategy meetings about child sexual exploitation coordinate strong partnership work and prioritise well-formulated safety plans. More serious concerns for children's safety are promptly escalated for regular senior management review and direction.
24. Appropriate referrals are made to a multi-agency sexual exploitation panel which closely scrutinises and actively reviews the impact of multi-agency plans to reduce risks to young people experiencing, or at high risk of, sexual exploitation. Return home interviews are offered to all young people who go missing. Persistent efforts are made to speak to these young people, and a variety of engagement approaches are used to secure a meaningful conversation. Some young people, despite the best efforts of agencies, decline return home interviews. Where undertaken, return interview reports are highly informative, giving a clear picture of the child's circumstances while missing and their potential exposure to multiple risks. Swift plans are devised and actions pursued to reduce risks for the majority of these children. For a minority of children at high risk of sexual exploitation and associated risks, stringent efforts to engage and support them are not always successful and,

for this small number of young people, care proceedings should have been considered sooner.

25. Parents who wish to educate their children at home are able to access appropriate support to provide their children with a suitable education. Efforts to ensure that children are safe are pursued and managed appropriately.
26. The 'missing education' team uses well-established links with local partners, including other local authorities, general practitioners, housing services, schools and admission teams, to identify children who are not on a school roll. Where such children are identified, appropriate contact with parents is initiated to work with them to ensure that children are enrolled at school. Where cases remain unresolved, they are passed to the MASH for escalation. Appropriate provision is provided for permanently excluded pupils.
27. The local authority appropriately discharges duties to privately fostered children, undertaking assessments and providing advice and information to partners and family members. At the time of the inspection, no children were in private fostering arrangements. Under the close oversight of the Camden Safeguarding Children's Board (CSCB), the local authority continues to promote targeted, widespread and regular awareness-raising activities and campaigns to encourage appropriate notifications.
28. Designated officer arrangements ensure that all allegations and concerns about adults working or in contact with children are managed carefully, effectively and quickly. Joint-working arrangements with the police, schools and other agencies are well established and there is widespread understanding of the role throughout Camden agencies. Appropriate scrutiny and oversight are undertaken by the LSCB.
29. Assessments undertaken for young people aged 16 and 17 presenting as homeless are timely and, when necessary, emergency accommodation is provided. Support and mediation services work intensively with young people and their families, successfully supporting many safe and enduring returns to family homes. For those young people for whom returning home is not feasible, appropriate accommodation is offered, under section 17 or section 20 of the Children Act 1989, that is suitable in the individual's circumstances.
30. MAPPA and MARAC are effective forums for managing the significant risks to children presented by domestic abuse and serious offending committed by young people and adults. Relevant agencies work effectively together, through sharing information and devising risk and support management plans. Whole-family working is evident, with risks of harm to brothers and sisters and other family members considered. Information exchange between social work teams is more structured and consistent for MARAC than for MAPPA. However, both forums should strengthen systems to ensure that information, actions and decisions from the panels are recorded in social work records and promptly followed up, as necessary.

31. The complexity of work and additional risk considerations to children extend to those when concerns of radicalisation, modern slavery and female genital mutilation are identified. Social workers receive training and support that enable them to be knowledgeable, confident and skilled in working with children with high-level risks to their safety and welfare. The identification and support offered to children and their families faced with risks of forced marriage or female genital mutilation are timely and effective in substantially reducing risks.
32. Strong strategic partnerships identify risks and gather intelligence to identify young people who may be linked to or at risk of radicalisation. The Channel panel considers a wide range of additional, interlocking risks to children, including domestic abuse and online grooming, with a wider community awareness. Trained social workers are well supported by a 'Prevent' duty coordinator. They work skilfully and confidently in partnership with agencies to assess risk and support families. Camden has been successful in a Home Office innovation funding bid for a project to train voluntary sector professionals to work with parents on safer internet use at home, to identify risks of online radicalisation.
33. Children and their families who arrive as refugees receive a sensitive, quick and effective response to meet their needs. They are promptly supported with their practical and emotional needs, and children receive health, education and therapeutic support to begin their recovery.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children looked after in Camden benefit from a consistently high-quality service. While social workers are determined to achieve the best outcomes for the children in their care and most children make good progress, not enough children have the opportunity to access advocacy and independent visitors.</p> <p>Camden’s strong resolve to avoid children entering public care ensures that most children become looked after only when it is in their best interests, although a small minority of children come into care too late. Children return home only when careful and thorough work has secured the necessary changes. Where a child is unable to return home, there is a clear focus on the actions necessary to achieve permanent living arrangements.</p> <p>Assessments to identify children’s needs are of the highest quality, and almost all children live in good, stable homes that meet their individual needs. Children living in Camden access comprehensive health services, although too few children receive timely initial assessments of their health needs.</p> <p>Children who live outside Camden continue to receive appropriate healthcare and other services, and move to good schools that meet their needs effectively. Risks for children who experience child sexual exploitation or gang activity or who go missing are recognised and mitigated by effective whole-system activity. Senior managers and council leaders genuinely care about the children whom they look after. The CiCC and young inspectors are influential in improving and designing services.</p> <p>Teachers, social workers and virtual school staff ensure that children continue in education and training when they leave school. Schools report positive relationships with the virtual school and how its support helps them to improve outcomes for children. However, persistent school absence remains too high and attainment is variable.</p> <p>Adoption services are strong. Children from a diverse range of backgrounds achieve permanence quickly. Matching is effective, and both children and their adoptive families are well prepared for their transition. Adopters are extremely positive about the level of support that they receive throughout their adoption journeys.</p> <p>Care leavers live in safe and secure accommodation, and most participate in education and employment. Consequently, a large majority make a successful transition to adulthood. However, a minority do not engage in education or employment and few are helped to understand their family health history, which may prevent them from receiving appropriate services as they go through life.</p>	

Inspection findings

34. Children become looked after only when it is in their best interests. Children remain in their families for as long as it is safe to do so, because of the local authority's determination to avoid care until all other options have been carefully analysed and exhausted. Decisions to look after children arise from analytical assessments which take into account historical and current risks, protective factors and the likelihood of positive change. Family group conferences and comprehensive viability assessments take place at the earliest stage, informing well-considered decisions about whether children can safely live with extended family members.
35. Social workers and managers use reflective 'thinking together' discussions to understand children's needs so that children receive the best help. Managers oversee detailed care pathways planning, which often features bold and skilled approaches. Although comprehensive, this approach is not always sufficiently decisive for a few children, and a small minority of children have not come into care quickly enough. This means that they have remained in emotionally neglectful circumstances longer than necessary. Managers have recognised this, and a recent successful innovation funding bid will focus on the impact of interventions for children in need aged 10 to 13 years of age to help to identify those at risk neglect earlier, but this is not yet in place.
36. Pre-proceedings work with families is effective and timely, featuring meetings with parents that clearly set out the changes that are required. Families are encouraged and receive help to access legal advice. Care proceedings are progressed within the 26-week threshold. Camden has a solid reputation with both the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the judiciary for producing timely and coherent court work. This ensures that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.
37. Children return home only when it is safe to do so, after purposeful direct work has achieved the necessary changes. Following a child's return home, the child and family continue to receive careful support. Social workers reduce the level of intervention only when careful and considered assessment evidences that positive change is firmly rooted. For this reason, fewer children are experiencing the instability of repeat episodes in care.
38. Plans to find permanent homes for children are closely tracked. Regular permanence planning meetings take place, ensuring a clear focus on the actions necessary to achieve permanence. In a small number of cases, greater clarity relating to the timescales for completion of actions would enable even tighter tracking of planning meeting outcomes.
39. Tenacious and enthusiastic social workers visit children regularly and talk with them about what is happening in their lives, so that children understand their

circumstances and the plans for their future. Well-recorded summaries clearly detail the purpose of the visits, the impact of direct work and children's wishes and feelings. Social workers listen carefully to children and know them well. Almost every child spoken to during the inspection was complimentary about the quality of relationship that they have with their current social worker. Camden has changed the structure of services for children looked after because of what children have told them, and this means that children keep the same social worker for longer.

40. Advocacy services are available for children to access by themselves. Many children are aware that advocacy is available and find it helpful when they use it. However, not all children are aware of it, and managers do not promote advocacy provision effectively across the service. Only 23 children looked after accessed advocacy services last year. More work is also needed to ensure that all children looked after understand their rights and entitlements, and have access to independent help whenever they have concerns.
41. Children looked after do not have independent visitors and, although this service is commissioned as required, it is not a readily available or well-established offer for children. Easier access to independent visitors would further enhance the experiences of many children looked after in Camden.
42. Work to reduce the risks to children and young people who go missing, are sexually or gang exploited or vulnerable to multiple harm is highly effective. Efficient, well-coordinated and integrated whole-system activity with the police, health and other partners across the local authority demonstrates a confident and knowledgeable response to mitigating risks. Although work with this group of complex and more independent older children is not always able to remove risk altogether, the persistence and intensity of efforts send a clear and important message to them that their social workers care about what happens to them. Return home interviews are exceptionally detailed and, by listening carefully to children, they accurately identify and aid an understanding of the reasons why children go missing and the level and type of risks that they encounter.
43. The emotional and physical health needs of children looked after are monitored and overseen effectively by a dedicated health team. Healthcare provision in Camden is extensive and well integrated. A comprehensive array of easily accessible services meets the needs of children, including the specialist needs of children who are unaccompanied minors. A comparatively large population of unaccompanied minors benefit from an assessment by a psychotherapist at their initial health assessment, which identifies trauma at the earliest opportunity. A small team of CAMHS staff is co-located with the children looked after, care leavers and fostering and adoption teams. A complex needs service maintains scrupulous oversight of assessments and ensures the right placements for disabled children who are looked after.

44. However, the poor timeliness of initial health assessments is a continuing and long-standing concern. Social workers do not always prioritise referrals to the looked after children health service, and they are slow to obtain the necessary consent from parents. A well-developed and effective pathway enables unaccompanied minors and asylum seeking families to quickly access a wide range of emotional and physical health services. A health improvement practitioner tracks all referrals and is proactive in chasing up a significant number of young people who miss appointments.
45. Teachers, social workers and virtual school staff work well to promote the progress of all children looked after. The consequence of the relatively high numbers of older children becoming looked after is that some have significant barriers to learning. Despite subsequent relentless work by professionals, their attainment is variable. The rate of persistent school absence remains too high, and this is a priority of the virtual school's current work.
46. Workers consider carefully the educational needs of children when they enter care, particularly when they move from primary to secondary school or have a change of placement that makes it difficult for them to remain in their current school. When these circumstances arise, staff ensure that children are placed in a good or outstanding school that can cater for their particular needs.
47. Staff compile and review personal educational plans at appropriate intervals. However, the quality of these is mixed. Although there are a number of extremely thorough examples that consider children's needs carefully, others lack clear evidence of the views of children, have insufficient analysis of their needs or lack clear action plans with measurable outcomes. Although the virtual school allocates pupil premium plus funding appropriately, staff do not always fully evaluate its impact.
48. Virtual school staff provide well-regarded training, advice and guidance for school staff on such topics as attachment theory. They also provide termly networking meetings for designated teachers and a half-termly bulletin providing useful information that helps teachers to support children looked after. This supports effective communication between professionals and ensures that they have a clear and consistent focus on improvement in children's outcomes.
49. Most children looked after continue in education and training until they are at least 18. Staff identify young people who are at risk of dropping out of education as they leave school. They meet frequently to consider how they can best support these young people to remain in education, training or employment. They produce clear action plans, monitor their impact and intervene quickly when problems arise.
50. The voices of the CiCC and young inspectors are strong and influential in the local authority. The perspectives of children looked after are given prominence

and are brought to life in corporate parenting board meetings and other council forums. Children are rightly proud of the impact that they have had, and continue to exert, in the design, review and planning of services. They value highly the relationships that they have with senior managers and members, and regard Camden as an active, responsive and committed corporate parent.

51. The vast majority of children live in suitable, stable homes that meet their individual needs well. This includes a sizeable and increasing number of unaccompanied minors, older children with high levels of vulnerability and some young people who pose a risk to others. Older teenage children continue to benefit from a young people's pathway, which keeps the majority of children living in the local authority or reasonably close to Camden in adjacent boroughs. They are able to continue easily accessing the consistently good services provided by Camden social workers and partners. Children receive good support to manage placement moves when they are unavoidable.
52. Children who move out of the local authority area receive the same support as those moving school within the borough. On the rare occasions when staff cannot immediately secure a school place, the virtual school provides interim individual tuition. Social workers visit children looked after regularly and ensure that they continue accessing the services that they need. The CAMHS and looked after children's health teams maintain close oversight of Camden children, ensuring that the small minority of children living more than 20 miles away continue to have their physical and emotional health needs met.
53. Children have carefully assessed and well-supervised contact with their families. These arrangements provide children with the best possible chance of maintaining important relationships. When sustaining these relationships is not in their best interests, social workers help children to understand why.
54. The quality of children's care plans is consistently good, and independent reviewing officers (IROs) regularly and effectively review them. Timely and specific actions ensure that progress for children is measured, and slow progress is recognised and challenged. IROs are co-located with the looked after children teams, which facilitates ongoing informal information exchange and oversight. Children's plans change when their circumstances alter, and their carefully recorded diverse identity profiles are well considered through careful planning and matching.
55. Although IROs have realistic numbers of children on their caseloads, the CiCC was unaware that children could speak to IROs outside the formal review process. There is more work to be done to raise the profile of the IRO role with all children looked after.
56. The local authority is working hard, through targeted advertising and recruitment activity, to increase the number of foster placements for children,

although the impact is modest. A specialist foster carers scheme supports children with additional support needs, but there has been no increase in the number of foster placements over the past two years. Foster carers speak very positively about the service that they receive from the well-managed fostering service. Foster carers particularly cite the availability and quality of support that they receive from their social workers. A thorough training offer is available, and a large number of carers complete the training, support and development standards programme in their first year of fostering. Foster carers and social workers understand delegated authority well. Clear delegated authority agreements are in place which enable foster carers to make important, routine day-to-day decisions for children placed with them.

57. Children receive help to live in good-quality homes with carers who can meet their needs. The local authority recognises that this is a continual challenge, particularly to identify homes for children with very complex needs. There is intensive and committed work by staff to find the right homes for children. For example, a specialist foster carer is available for children at risk of sexual exploitation. A further example of effective corporate parenting is the local authority allocating 10 larger, two- to four-bedroom properties for fostering households. Camden foster carers also receive a council tax exemption, which has increased the number of enquiries about fostering.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is Outstanding

58. Camden demonstrates a sense of urgency in its adoption work. Adoption is considered for all children who are thought to be unable to return to their birth parents. The local authority has recognised the importance of ensuring that adoption, when appropriate, happens at the earliest opportunity and achieves it for most children. Any changes of plan away from adoption are the result of either court decisions or well-evidenced analytical assessments based on changes of circumstances.
59. Careful management oversight of children's progress towards adoption or other permanent placements is achieved through a range of effective processes, including trackers and effective caseload management. A clear understanding of children's need for timely permanence is embedded in service provision. An increasing number of special guardianship orders means that permanence is appropriately achieved for some children through this route. Thorough, timely, analytical assessments ensure that the capacity of special guardianship carers to provide permanence for children is well understood and that any risks are clearly identified. Support plans are thorough, and the needs of carers and children are well met through various means of provision.

60. Children in Camden receive a highly effective service from a well-established and experienced team of social workers, led by committed and knowledgeable managers. Social workers know their children well and closely track those awaiting permanence. Early planning and permanence meetings involve both children's social workers and adoption social workers, where information is shared about children's needs and individual circumstances. As a result, the adoption team is fully informed about children for whom the plan may be adoption. The adoption team is able to evaluate potential matches at an early stage, considering both approved adopters and those being assessed.
61. All children waiting for adoption have potential links with adopters or are the subject of rigorous family-finding activity. Information is shared promptly across the north London adoption consortium, in which proactive family finding occurs. In some cases, this is in advance of placement orders being secured. These proactive efforts, together with good use of national links, help to ensure that permanence is quickly achieved for children in Camden. There is appropriate early consideration of in-house adopters, while understanding that a suitable match may not be available, taking into account the particular needs of children. Family finders are tenacious and, consequently, over the past two years, the local authority has been successful in achieving adoption for brothers and sisters together, and for children from Black and Mixed heritage backgrounds. A determined focus on improving timescales is leading to children being placed with their adoptive families more promptly. The time taken between a child entering care and moving in with their adopters has shown a significant recent improvement.
62. Parallel planning routinely takes place to minimise delay. 'Foster to adopt' arrangements are in place, and two children in the past two years have been placed through this pathway. 'Foster to adopt' is routinely discussed with prospective adopters. Inspectors saw examples where 'foster to adopt' placements were considered for children. However, the local authority recognises the need to further develop 'foster to adopt' arrangements to ensure that the potential benefits for children are more widely understood.
63. Child permanence reports are of a consistently high standard. They are comprehensive and analytical, describing clearly why children are not able to live with their birth parents. They demonstrate a thorough understanding of children's lived experiences and their specific needs in relation to their age, health, development, any disability and their identity. This helps to achieve successful matches with potential adopters.
64. Assessments to consider whether brothers and sisters should be adopted together are of a good quality. The rationale for decisions about children being separated or staying together is well founded. The views of adults who know children well are capably illustrated.
65. Children are prepared sensitively and thoroughly for adoption through gradual, phased introductions, proceeding at their pace. Life-story work is of a

high quality. It is clear, colourful and jargon free, enhanced by the use of children's own words and drawings. In a small number, more information explaining why children could not live with their birth parents would help children's understanding. Social workers are skilled in undertaking direct work with children, helping them to understand their histories and enabling them to establish attachments to their new families. This work helps most children to settle quickly. Selection meetings demonstrate vigorous oversight to evaluate whether potential adopters can meet the needs of children. Foster carers assist with introductions, helping children who are adopted to form attachments to their new parents. Effective matching preparation and support have contributed to stable adoptive placements. There have been no placement breakdowns, either before or after adoption orders have been granted, for the past two years.

66. Assessments of potential adopters, while small in number, are thorough and timely, enabling the adoption panel and agency decision maker (ADM) to make well-informed recommendations and decisions about approval. When assessments are delayed, the reasons are carefully recorded. The rationale for ADM decisions is very detailed, including clear analyses of why adoption is the right permanence plan for children. Adopters speak very positively about their experience of assessments and the training provided, giving them confidence and a thorough understanding of the needs of children with adoption plans. Adopters from a wide range of backgrounds are approved, reflecting appropriately the diverse communities in Camden.
67. An experienced, knowledgeable panel chair with a professional background in adoption work chairs the adoption panel. Panel members closely examine reports prior to meetings, devising incisive and pertinent questions for social workers and potential adopters concerning matches and approvals. Panel minutes evidence regular scrutiny and challenge. The panel comprises an experienced blend of professional and lay members. All panel members are appraised annually by the adoption panel chair, and attend training and development events.
68. Children benefit from meaningful contact with those important to them. Assessments clearly identify what contact, and with whom, is in children's best interests following their adoption. Both direct and indirect contact is effectively supported. Consequently, children benefit from maintaining contact with members of their birth families when appropriate, and from receiving letters that will help them to understand their identities as they grow up.
69. Later-life letters are comprehensive and sensitively written to help children to understand how and why they were adopted. They are compassionate, sympathetic, yet realistic accounts of the experiences and limitations of children's birth parents. Adopters report that they receive later-life letters and life-story books promptly after children come to live with them, meaning that they are prepared for any questions that children may have about their

journey to adoption. Birth parents are actively encouraged to access counselling and support through the consortium arrangements. Social workers in the adoption team help birth parents to write letters to children, and offer them support when they receive letters from adoptive parents.

70. A substantial range of effective adoption support services are available. Arrangements to support children and adopters before and after adoption are timely and responsive. Adoption support assessments identify individual needs, and design customised support packages. Adopters speak highly about the support that they receive from their social workers throughout their adoption journeys. A particular strength identified by adopters is the availability of the agency medical adviser to help them to understand the health histories of children and their birth parents. Good use is made of the adoption support fund and a significant number of applications have been made, resulting in families receiving the specialist support that they need.

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

71. Local authority staff work hard to remain in contact with care leavers and, consequently, are in touch with almost all of them. For the very few with whom they have lost touch, workers are persistent in their attempts to re-establish contact.
72. Workers actively encourage young people to remain looked after until it is appropriate for them to become more independent. As a result, only nine of 119 (7.6%) current 16- and 17-year-olds have left care, and an increasing number of young people remain with their foster carers in 'staying put' placements. However, this option is not available for the comparatively larger number of young people in Camden who are in residential placements when they become 18 years of age. There have been no recent cases of homeless 16- and 17 year-olds. When a care leaver expresses a wish to live independently, workers assess their readiness and discuss options with them.
73. The vast majority of young people who move into independent or semi-independent accommodation live in suitable and safe properties. The local authority provides access to a good range of supported accommodation and gives assistance to young people living in private housing. Staff prioritise care leavers' access to the local authority's own housing stock, and will make an offer of a property to care leavers before it becomes more generally available. Houses in multiple occupancy are used only where this is the young person's preferred option, and then only after its suitability is fully assessed. Young people feel safe and supported, and have accommodation and support tailored to their needs.

74. Local authority staff provide good support that helps care leavers to maintain successful tenancies. Where tenancies do break down, personal advisers help young people to secure safe alternative accommodation, with access to 30 emergency beds commissioned through a partner.
75. Care leavers receive appropriate support to help them to develop the skills that they need to live independently. Those who move into supported accommodation receive help to develop skills such as cooking, cleaning and managing their own finances. Where young people remain in a foster placement, personal advisers support and encourage their carers to help them to develop independence skills.
76. Personal advisers understand how to access a range of support services, including drug and alcohol misuse interventions, for the young people whom they support. In the small number of cases where drug misuse has been a problem, appropriate support was provided that resulted in substantial improvements in the young person's well-being. Personal advisers are also knowledgeable about the potential risks of sexual exploitation for vulnerable young adults, and take appropriate action where this is a concern.
77. Personal advisers review care leavers' pathway plans on time and at appropriate intervals. Almost all pathway plans are clear and detailed, focusing appropriately on the themes most likely to have a positive impact on each young person's life, including their health, education and relationships with others. Care leavers describe how reviews of their plan help them to focus on the things that they need to improve, although they find the plans themselves of limited value. In a few cases, young people choose not to participate fully in their reviews, although personal advisers work tenaciously to engage them and revisit important topics that will help them to have a positive future.
78. Personal advisers understand the health needs of their young people and usually document them clearly in pathway plans. Almost all care leavers register with medical services such as doctors and dentists and, where necessary, their personal adviser ensures that they access services when they need to. Personal advisers provide effective support for young people who need specific help with, for example, their mental health. Inspectors saw examples of personal advisers advocating for them when the service that they have received has not been good enough. Disabled young people receive a good standard of care and support.
79. The proportion of care leavers who participate in education, employment and training has risen and, at 64.6%, is higher than in England as a whole. Most participate on a full-time basis. Around half of children looked after access additional careers advice and guidance during Year 11, and this helps them to make appropriate post-16 choices. Relationships with local post-16 providers

are good, and enable local authority staff to successfully support both the young person and the provider when difficulties arise.

80. Staff provide training sessions to help care leavers who are not in education or employment to prepare for work and find suitable opportunities. The local authority has begun to prioritise care leavers for its own apprenticeship vacancies through a guaranteed interview scheme. It currently employs four care leavers as apprentices, two of whom joined through the authority's traineeship programme. One care leaver, who has successfully completed an apprenticeship, now works for the authority on a permanent basis. There are currently two care leavers undertaking a traineeship programme with a view to moving into an apprenticeship. Overall, the local authority explores a wide range of opportunities to assist young people with their education and learning needs.
81. Care leavers receive the documents that they need to begin their adult lives, including birth certificates, national insurance numbers and bank account details. Care leavers are provided with their health histories, including relevant family health conditions. However, some care leavers advised inspectors that they were unaware of receiving these documents, indicating that the local authority should ensure that all care leavers have received them.
82. Care leavers receive appropriate advice that helps them to understand the support and benefits to which they are entitled. The local authority has worked with care leavers to produce a guide that is available both in print and online. Personal advisers explain entitlements to young people during pathway plan reviews and when they become eligible for, or in need of, a particular benefit.
83. Most care leavers spoken to by inspectors feel good about themselves. They state that their personal advisers genuinely care about them, and they are proud of their successes. The local authority holds events to celebrate their achievements, such as a recent event in which care leavers were presented with certificates recognising the progress that they had made in various aspects of their lives, such as living independently, educational attainment, and improving their health and well-being.

Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p>Summary</p> <p>Ambitious senior leaders and managers in Camden provide good and effective services for vulnerable children, and these both protect them and improve their outcomes. Strong governance arrangements and a shared partnership vision and priorities have resulted in considerably increased levels of investment in early help and targeted support services.</p> <p>Significant investment in, and a planned transformation towards, a systemic model of social work practice create a positive environment in which social workers want to work, feel safe, confident and empowered. Visible and approachable senior managers, co-located with staff who have manageable caseloads, give social workers permission to be bold and innovative. Managers ensure that social workers spend time with children, yet recognise that further work is needed on the consistency of recording of management oversight.</p> <p>Dedicated, committed and intelligent partnerships understand the thresholds for intervention and share a whole-family approach. A few children become looked after too late, and managers have plans in place to more effectively target emerging adolescent neglect through successful innovation funding. Managers have purposefully restructured services and changed procedures and workflows to give children a more flexible service response. This has reduced the number of changes of social workers experienced by children, to ensure that their support is right from the start.</p> <p>Senior leaders have both significant knowledge and an intelligent understanding of the issue of child sexual exploitation. This enables them to respond quickly to protect children at risk. They recognise the complexities and interdependencies that create additional risks to children, demonstrated by outstanding partnership work with children susceptible to gang affiliation and risk of radicalisation.</p> <p>Children have an active, continuous and meaningful voice in Camden. The CiCC has a close and important relationship with the corporate parenting board, and young inspectors complete high-quality and complex inspections of operational practice.</p> <p>Senior managers have a good understanding of frontline practice through appropriate use of performance information. While regular quality assurance activity is intelligently used to improve frontline practice, there remain areas for improvement. These include increasing the timeliness of initial health assessments for children looked after, increasing their access to independent visitors and all care leavers understanding their health histories.</p>	

Inspection findings

84. The executive director for supporting people (the director of children's services) in Camden passionately champions and determinedly pursues high-quality social work practice to help and protect children. He successfully encourages collaboration and innovation with partners, and has a professional background as a social worker, bringing a strong knowledge foundation to children's services. The chief executive has total confidence in the director of children's services (DCS), who has an enlarged portfolio for children, adult and housing services. A test of assurance was completed as a consequence of a major departmental restructure implemented in April 2016. The DCS, with senior managers and politicians, models a genuine commitment to a whole-family approach. This is gradually permeating each layer of local authority services, from early help to specialist intervention, resulting in tangible improvements to children's lives.
85. Children and their families benefit from a comprehensive, increasingly integrated multi-agency early help offer. An extensive range of universal and targeted support services, co-located with health and other partners, underpin a resilient families programme. This is intelligently informed by the joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA) and detailed socio-economic profiling of local communities at ward level. Diligent oversight from the Children's Trust partnership board supplies strong cross-partner commitment and investment in this shared vision and culture, purposefully continuing a gradual rebalancing of services towards effective earlier prevention. A committed and impressive management team is evident across early help services, focusing on enabling families to increase their resilience and find their own solutions. A positive result of this rapidly developing integrated delivery model features significant improvements in many public health indicators for all young children in Camden.
86. Partnership working is strong. Through transparent governance arrangements, partners share accountability equally with senior local authority managers. They fulfil their statutory duties to safeguard children from harm and promote their welfare to a consistently high standard. This approach pervades throughout children's services, with excellent partnership work evidenced, for example, in the co-located and highly effective multi-agency safeguarding hub. The chief executive, DCS and lead member for children's services have regular meetings with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) independent chair, and present themed safeguarding reports to the children, schools and family scrutiny panel. This enables senior leaders and partners to support and interrogate each other, fulfilling their aspiration that 'no child is left behind'.
87. A remarkable CiCC has a high regard for managers and leaders in Camden, reporting a respectful and highly constructive relationship with the corporate parenting board and members. A dedicated and committed lead member co-chairs the board with the elected member who also sits on the permanency

panel. Senior managers meet with the CiCC prior to every meeting to help to prepare themselves. The CiCC has a meaningful voice in Camden, and senior managers and leaders closely listen to and pursue their actions and recommendations. Children looked after, for example, reported that they did not like changing social workers at the age of 16, when they transfer to the 16-plus service. Managers responded by removing workflow barriers, allowing children to remain allocated to their current social workers if they chose.

88. Senior managers continue to promote and sustain long-term investment in the work of young inspectors. Their work is outstanding and exceptional in its range and quality. Young inspectors scrutinise areas across the service that are complex and emotionally challenging. They engage children and seek their views, informing subsequent recommendations and plans. Inspections include an investigation into the effectiveness of responses to children at risk of child sexual exploitation and into support for teenagers, which informed a targeted service offer and, more recently, services for disabled children. Senior managers take all recommendations seriously and, where possible, implement them. Effective governance of these inspections includes review by the children's scrutiny panel, the LSCB and the corporate parenting board. Relevant findings are shared across the local authority to inform learning and improvements.
89. Children receive a quick and efficient response when they are identified as being at risk of, or having been exposed to, child sexual exploitation. This involves very strong strategic and operational arrangements. Police, local authority managers and other partners have developed significant knowledge and expertise to manage and reduce the risks to children. The DCS co-chairs the strategy group on child sexual exploitation with a senior police officer, and an analyst of child sexual exploitation sits within the multi-agency safeguarding hub, enabling the timely sharing of useful and incisive intelligence across the partnership. Camden is rightly proud of its innovation and achievements in keeping children safe. Strategic and operational planning informs highly effective, nimble operational practices to identify, respond and disrupt a range of dangers and cross-cutting exploitation of children, including serious youth violence, knife crime, drug running and gang affiliations. Creative examples of this include 'live' daily sharing of intelligence on drug and gang activity and close liaison with British Transport Police, who speak to vulnerable young people seen travelling alone at major railway stations in Camden. The borough has also developed helpful relationships with social media providers to monitor children's safety online.
90. Senior managers anticipate and demonstrate an understanding of the complexity and interdependencies of multiple risks for children. Extensive multi-agency partnerships, including the police, children's social work, youth offending service, CAHMS, public health, clinical commissioning group (CCG) and the voluntary sector, coherently respond to intervene and protect children involved with gangs and serious youth violence. Overarching strategic

partnerships, including the LSCB and the community safety partnership board (CSPB), promote collaborative joint work through well-designed operational frameworks. These deliver a range of intelligence-led, preventative, targeted and enforcement activities.

91. Children and adults vulnerable to radicalisation receive proactive multi-agency interventions to reduce risks and share intelligence. Strong strategic governance arrangements include regular briefings between the CSPB, LSCB, the children's senior management team and cabinet members. This collaboration is reflected in strong operational practice, demonstrated in the identification and assessment of children's individual needs and vulnerabilities, informing their intervention plans. Senior managers effectively discharge their 'Prevent' duty, assisted by wide partner representation on the Channel panel, using intelligence to identify additional risks to children, including domestic abuse, online grooming and wider community safety concerns.
92. Partnership investment and integrated commissioning with health partners are highly developed and interwoven through children's services. Children in need of emotional and mental health support receive effective, timely and accessible interventions from CAHMS, both in early help and in children's social care. The Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), suitably informed by the JSNA, is purposefully progressing the transformation of mental health services, including the exemplary 'Minding the Gap' programme, which supports young people aged 16 to 24 years to prepare and plan their transitions into adult mental health services. This initiative, supported by inbuilt consultation with young people, led to the creation of 'The Hive', a safe place for young people to receive a wide range of mental health support, including outreach services and parent support groups run in parallel for their carers. This is helping to improve mental health outcomes for young people in Camden by identifying their needs earlier, reducing hospital admissions and social isolation. This investment has also reduced clinic non-attendance rates from 17% in 2015–16 to 8% in 2016–17, demonstrating the increasingly successful engagement of young people.
93. This strong strategic work has not transferred into consistently effective operational practice for some children looked after and care leavers. Managers know that they need to improve both the timeliness of initial health assessments for children looked after and their opportunities to access independent visitors. In addition, more work is required to ensure that care leavers have all the information on their family's health history that they need.
94. Senior leaders understand and provide excellent services to meet the diverse needs of children within their community. Integrated partnership arrangements support the extensive and complex needs of refugees. The local authority has resettled a significant number of refugees, in addition to an extensive offer of support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This resettlement programme illustrates the highly evolved capacity of the council, working with a range of other partners to plan for and meet the needs of the

most vulnerable and traumatised children and families over both short- and longer-term periods.

95. Social workers want to work in Camden, and all staff who shared their views with inspectors passionately reported that it is a great place to work. Senior managers have created an environment in which social workers feel safe, are confident and receive good frontline management and peer support. The DCS directive of giving social workers 'freedom within a framework' empowers them to try new ideas to improve their practice during a phased transition to a systemic model of social work practice. This gives social workers increased autonomy, enabling them to be innovative in their decision-making, as is clearly seen in the Camden model of social work.
96. The head of children's quality assurance is a highly active and visible principal social worker (PSW). Her work has been pivotal to the success of the phased implementation of the systemic practice model. The PSW proactively participates in frontline operational practice, for example regularly attending child protection conferences and supporting multi-agency complex panel meetings. The PSW also chairs the systemic champions group and participates in audit activity and serious case review learning in the LSCB. This provides far-reaching oversight across frontline practice, strengthening quality assurance arrangements.
97. Senior managers thoughtfully support social workers to be part of the systemic transformation of services and organisational culture. They have a direct voice to senior managers, resulting in high standards of professionalism, ownership and pride in their practice. Regular, reflective group supervision and the use of a range of direct work tools with children bring constructive analyses of risks and respectful challenges to social workers' assessments. They willingly share expertise and knowledge with each other. A commitment to manageable caseloads gives social workers time to build strong and nurturing professional relationships with children.
98. Supplementing this is a continuous and embedded culture of learning and a strong intent to continually improve frontline practice. Managers actively encourage and support social workers to pursue further short- and longer-term academic studies to enhance their professional knowledge, skills and development. Additionally, staff can readily access a comprehensive training and development programme. This includes 'total respect' training, facilitated by young people in care for foster carers and all staff working with children and their families. Social workers speak highly of the generous range of training opportunities that they are encouraged to pursue. Consequently, at the time of inspection, a third of social workers held a relevant masters-level qualification, illustrating the learning culture and the importance attached to it.

99. Local authority managers work hard to retain their talented permanent staff and, while the use of agency staff has recently increased to 18%, this remains within national averages and below that of some statistical neighbours. There is some success with agency workers who remain for longer periods transitioning into permanent posts. Managers promote the 'growing your own' recruitment of social workers, and encourage more experienced social workers to undertake practice educators' training. There are 35 qualified practice educators, supporting a comprehensive assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme.
100. Senior managers and leaders receive a wealth of performance management information, congruent with an up-to-date quality assurance framework. This informs service planning and targeted auditing work effectively. One example of this is a successful Department for Education innovation funding bid, aimed at improving evidence-led interventions and addressed particularly at the long-term neglect of children in need aged 10 to 13 years. This follows a cogent analysis of performance information on the high numbers of teenagers becoming looked after. Consistent use of quality assurance tools across all social work teams enables managers to measure tangible improvements in frontline practice and tackle stubborn areas that need improvement. This includes consistent recording of frontline management supervision, the rationale for decisions, the quality and frequency of recording in some children's records, and the visible transfer of MARAC and MAPPA recommendations. Quality audits demonstrate some improvements in these areas, but they are not yet sufficiently widespread.
101. Monthly performance information, cascaded to social workers and team managers, has a limited narrative that explores trends and variations. This is not always helpful for frontline managers in specifically identifying necessary practice improvements. During the inspection, performance management information did not report on how quickly workers in the early help or social work teams visit children following referrals. At the time of the inspection, audits of initial children in need visits reported that only 56% of children were seen in seven days, meeting stipulated timescales, and 77.8% within 10 days. This illustrates that the information is easily accessible, and thus it is a missed opportunity for senior managers to monitor and improve this important area of operational practice.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is outstanding

Executive summary

Camden's Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is outstanding. It has well-established and highly effective arrangements in place to hold partner agencies to account for safeguarding children. An exceptional commitment to continuously improve frontline practice is both evident and demonstrable.

Led by an experienced, effective chair, the culture of the board and its sub-groups is one of openness and constructive challenge. Partners are both engaged and highly committed to monitoring the effectiveness of safeguarding services for all children in Camden.

Strategic priorities are informed by a comprehensive analysis of local need that is reflected accurately in the business plan of the board and its sub-groups. For this reason, actions are identified and taken that lead to demonstrable improvements in the safeguarding of children and young people.

The sub-groups that support the board are a real strength. An effective focus on engaging the community in safeguarding has resulted in a heightened profile and understanding of some specific risks that children face, such as female genital mutilation and potential risks of abuse from family beliefs about spirit possession. The online safety sub-group has raised the profile of the risks that children can face when using the internet, and provided useful resources and training to help to tackle this issue.

Learning from audits and serious case reviews (SCRs) is a well-established culture of the board. The LSCB's multi-agency and single-agency audit activity is reviewed and scrutinised. Learning is widely shared and actions closely monitored to ensure that recommended changes to practice are made and sustained. Learning from SCRs is a strength that is evident across all of the board's activities.

A clear understanding of priorities and local issues informs the board's multi-agency training programme, and its impact on subsequent practice is evaluated well to inform future need. There is a wide-ranging programme of highly effective and targeted multi-agency training for partners. Expertise from local professionals is willingly shared through workshops to enhance the training provided.

Recommendations

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

102. An experienced chair leads the Camden Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). He is highly respected by all partners, who value his relentless focus on safeguarding the children of Camden through effective challenge. The culture of the board and its sub-groups is one of constructive openness and vibrant and focused debate, demonstrating mature relationships. This collective resolve to work together, continually reviewing practice and appropriately challenging that of other agencies, is evident in every aspect of the board's work.
103. Governance arrangements are highly effective, with clear lines of communication between the chair, executive director (the director of children's services), lead member and the chief executive. Senior leaders actively represent their agencies on the board, including chairing many of its sub-groups. Attendance at meetings is consistently good and includes two lay members. The lead member attends as a participating observer. Safeguarding is highly integrated within the partnerships across Camden, with well-established links between strategic boards and a clear alignment of priorities. For example, the 1001-day project, seeking to identify and address vulnerabilities early in a child's life, is a work stream of the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB). It fits well and appropriately with the priority area of parental mental health of the LSCB, and is also aligned with the council's resilient families programme. The LSCB chair attends the HWB and the Children's Trust partnership board, presenting both the annual report and business plan. These are also presented to the council's scrutiny committee. This strong commitment of partnerships to safeguard children is evident throughout strategies and everyday operational working relationships, from senior managers to frontline staff. Links are slowly developing between the safeguarding adults partnership board (SAPB) and the LSCB, through joint work on shared priority areas concerning domestic abuse, parental mental health and modern slavery.
104. The board's priorities are clear and arise from a thorough analysis of local needs, also reflecting learning from serious case reviews, both locally and nationally. All board partners are able to explain the priorities of the board and give examples of how they work collaboratively to deliver them. Business and work plans are dynamic, and the maturity of partnership arrangements, alongside the depth of understanding, means that the board can be flexible when new issues emerge. Some priorities were appropriately carried over from the previous year, such as the issue of child sexual exploitation, now aligned with 'vulnerable adolescents'. This demonstrates the board's understanding of the cross-cutting, multiple risks facing the young people of

Camden. Other priorities include countering domestic abuse and preventing radicalisation, extremism and neglect.

105. Attendance at the majority of the board's sub-groups is high, showing a strong commitment from partners to the priority of safeguarding children. Furthermore, there is good engagement, wide membership and appropriate challenge at meetings. When there is a need for a specific piece of work to be undertaken, partners willingly contribute to task and finish groups. Partners spoke with passion about Camden, and all valued the work of the board.
106. Camden's highly diverse population is well understood, and the board seeks to ensure that all members of the community understand safeguarding. This emphasis is demonstrated through the board's community engagement sub-group. Various training and awareness-raising events have been held, including, for example, those pertaining to female genital mutilation and the possible risks of abuse to children arising from family beliefs about spirit possession. In conjunction with the Metropolitan Police 'Limelight' initiative, 200 families returning from holiday through St Pancras International Station were spoken to about female genital mutilation and harmful behaviours. In recognition that smaller organisations and community groups may not have the capacity to attend meetings, every effort is made to ensure that they are part of the local safeguarding network, with sub-group meetings held in the community. Networks share information appropriately to safeguard children. Links were made, for example, when there was a high incidence of hate crime near a particular school, enabling the board to give swift and clear messages to parents and advice on how to access support.
107. A regular programme of section 11 safeguarding audits is set out in the learning and improvement framework, overseen by the quality assurance sub-group. Where findings from audits indicate that an area of practice requires improvement, it is escalated within the partner agency for action and monitored by the sub-group. A challenge panel provides an additional layer of scrutiny, comprising managers from different partner agencies, a lay board member, and the board chair. Good practice is shared and constructive challenge is given to those areas needing improvement. For example, named professionals within the health sub-group reported that they were held to account to follow up actions to ensure stronger compliance with training. As a result of audits completed during 2016–17, the board ratified 22 safeguarding policies of voluntary and community organisations to ensure that they met the required standards.
108. The strong commitment to the board by partners is also demonstrated by their continuing financial contributions, despite the challenging fiscal situation across the spectrum of partner agencies. Budget contributions have remained at a broadly similar level, the largest contributors being the local authority and the clinical commissioning group (CCG). In addition, partner agencies willingly contribute resources through their commitment of time to the board. The

CCG's designated safeguarding nurse, for example, chairs the learning and development sub-group and attends two other sub-groups in addition to main board meetings.

109. The board receives a broad range of relevant information that is pertinent to its priority areas. A regular suite of performance information from partner agencies is received within a common board dataset. Additionally, narrative commentaries accompany recent data reports, enabling the board to focus on significant trend variations. Partners and lay members of the board reported that this enabled them to understand and critically challenge some information presented. Following the integration of the MASH and early help 'front door', for example, the board has maintained a strong interest in receiving reports and data to ensure its continuing understanding of the effective application of thresholds and the impact of early help. This demonstrates the board's determination to test the effectiveness of these arrangements and ensure that children are safeguarded through them.
110. Child sexual exploitation and missing children are a continued priority area for the board, expanded recently to a broader focus on troubled adolescents. The board ensures that it has an informed understanding of the nature and extent of local issues, in relation to children missing and at risk of sexual exploitation, through its child sexual exploitation strategy group and its operational multi-agency sexual exploitation group. Regular reports are scrutinised and rigorously challenged. The emphasis and understanding that partners demonstrate in safeguarding vulnerable children are further evidenced in strong links between the sub-groups. This results in avoiding duplicating work and in effective information sharing. Furthermore, partners can respond quickly, and meetings are seen as focused and purposeful. Recent work by the online safety sub-group, for example on its survey of schools in Camden, will shortly be used to inform the child sexual exploitation strategy regarding online grooming. Similarly, when it became evident from a high number of referrals from a specific school that child sexual exploitation was a particularly prominent issue, resources were promptly mobilised to target additional training for school staff.
111. A regularly updated challenge log captures the actions taken and their subsequent impact as a result of challenges registered. The board is highly diligent in following through the outcomes of challenges. The contribution of general practitioners (GPs) at case conferences, for example, increased from 22% in 2015, to 71.4% in 2016–17. By September 2017, contributions had further increased to 90%. A challenge concerning the relatively low attendance of police at multi-agency training led to a police representative sitting on the learning and development sub-group and more police officers subsequently being booked onto training programmes. This demonstrates the willingness of partners to purposefully and positively act on challenges.
112. A regular programme of multi-agency audits has been undertaken over the past two years. Topics have included young people who self-harm, the impact of

parental mental illness, and the MASH and child sexual exploitation. Learning from audits is evident, and helpful thematic recommendations are produced. An actions document, overseen by the quality assurance sub-group, monitors the implementation of recommendations and the impact of them. Twenty-seven schools, for example, attended training on mental health and first aid following an audit regarding self-harm. A workshop was held to strengthen joint working between adult mental health services and children's services, following a parental mental illness audit. Partners, through their understanding of current practice issues alongside learning from local and national trends, inform decisions of what is prioritised in audit programmes. The board noticed, for example, a clear correlation between children who self-harm and parents with mental health problems, resulting in a further multi-agency audit on parental mental illness. This is now a priority work area for the board.

113. Board partners also undertake single agency audits and share pertinent learning. A recent audit undertaken on the 'voice of the child' during medical safeguarding examinations identified the need to make changes. Following revisions to practice, a subsequent audit has demonstrated improvements. Partners enthusiastically reported how they disseminate their learning, demonstrating a genuine shared commitment to the safeguarding of children.
114. The LSCB website features up-to-date policies and procedures, including those adopted through pan-London arrangements, which are regularly reviewed by the quality assurance sub-group. The LSCB threshold document is clear and, as evidenced elsewhere in this report, well implemented and understood by agencies.
115. Learning from SCRs is deeply established in the board's business and work plans. Three SCRs and one local learning review have been undertaken over the past five years, and all recommendations were purposefully progressed in a clear action plan. Briefings, workshops and key messages have been included in safeguarding training. The majority of social workers spoken to during the inspection were aware of important messages from the SCRs. The board ensures that changes are embedded, through updated reports requested from partners to demonstrate this. Single-agency audits have been undertaken within health, for example, evaluating the effectiveness of communication between various health professionals. Multi-agency training has subsequently included more GPs, leading to increased referral rates. Frequent attention is paid to learning from other SCRs. The fostering team, for example, undertook a 'could it happen in Camden?' exercise following an SCR report from another local authority, and presented their findings to the quality assurance sub-group.
116. Learning from child deaths is evident. Effective links between partners, the board and its sub-groups result in identified actions being swiftly pursued. Coroner reports and SCRs often take a considerable time, but this does not

delay learning points being applied as soon as they are recognised. The implementation of advice on obtaining window locks and increasing preparations for participation in parenting groups at children's centres are two examples of prompt impact. Similarly, following a neonatal child death overview report, an audit is in progress to establish how reliably antenatal risk is identified across the two hospitals which provide antenatal care. This constant willingness to learn from frontline practice at every opportunity and to introduce subsequent improvements to safeguarding practices is a real strength of the board.

117. The board ensures that there is sufficient high-quality training available and has adopted the pan-London method of evaluation. Returns at 'stage three', the impact on practice, are high at 50%. This provides important feedback to the board on the impact of training. The reports prepared for the board lack narrative and analysis that could further inform the evaluation of impact on subsequent practice. However, despite this shortcoming, partner agencies respond promptly to the findings of training evaluations. Additional learning from the section 11 audit process, multi-agency and single-agency audits all feed into the planning cycle for future learning and development events. Furthermore, a training needs analysis and a comprehensive understanding of the board's priority areas result in the effective targeting and prioritisation of safeguarding training. Additionally, a high number of workshops and training events are arranged through sub-groups, task and finish groups and through agencies inviting other partners to join their training events. Members who are experts in their field are willing to share their expertise, illustrated for example, in training concerning female genital mutilation. This is a real strength of the board.
118. The board demonstrates a relentless focus on emerging safeguarding issues which are impacting on children. An online safety sub-group has been instrumental in supporting professionals to access relevant resources. Collaborative and effective working relationships ensure that the work plan for this group is purposefully progressed. Cross-membership with the child sexual exploitation strategy group ensures that links are made to the issue of online grooming. Foster carers and their supervising social workers are provided with information and training on the latest technology, 'apps' and privacy settings. This ensures that children hear consistent messages from their carers and schools. Following an online safety conference held in February 2017, partners recognised that clearer links were needed between personal, social, health and economic education teachers and information, technology and communication leads in schools. As a result, a pilot in five primary schools, with children who are 'online behaviour stars', is scheduled to start imminently.

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 differences 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 whom 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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

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