

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

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

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Children's services in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea are outstanding		
1. Children who need help and protection		Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Outstanding
	2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
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

Services for children and young people in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) are outstanding because they are resourced, planned and delivered very well by an exceptional workforce, ably supported by the talented senior leadership team and strong governance structure.

RBKC uses its well-developed Focus on Practice model of social work, which places a high value on relationship building between children their social workers, to deliver services that are consistently excellent. Exemplary application of this highly innovative model is also supported by social workers' very low caseloads, social workers remaining with children throughout their journey across all stages of social care intervention, clinicians embedded within social work teams, and the clear and charismatic leadership of RBKC's Director of Family Services (DFS) and its talented senior management team.

Exemplary tri-borough services, comprising RBKC, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster, augment RBKC's leadership and governance, and this is of an extraordinarily high quality. Senior leaders and elected members are well connected, well informed, and operate within a mature culture of respectful challenge. An absence of complacency leads to a strong culture of continuous learning, professional accountability and responsibility. The tri-borough Director of Children's Services (DCS) is a pivotal figure and manages this complex set of arrangements extremely well. Highly robust governance ensures that RBKC provides children's services of both an exceptionally wide range and a very high quality.

Existing strong services have been improved further and enhanced significantly since May 2012 when RBKC's services for safeguarding and children looked after were both judged by Ofsted to be good.

Services to help and protect children are good because thresholds for accessing an outstanding early-help offer and for receiving help from social workers are understood and applied well by the multi-agency partnership. Good social work flourishes in RBKC. Positive characteristics of the exceptionally wide range of services available include consistently comprehensive and analytical assessments of need, detailed plans of intervention to help families to achieve positive change, and unfailing management scrutiny and oversight of all cases.

A particularly positive feature of the service offered is the routine way in which social workers see children, see them alone and build robust relationships with them, so that they know them extremely well. This forms the basis of highly effective social work intervention to help protect children from risk of harm. However, the service would benefit from reviewing its arrangements to protect children out of hours, its approach to strategy meetings with partner agencies when there are concerns about children that require investigation, and capturing the intelligence from return home interviews for children who go missing.

A very high standard of care is offered to children looked after by RBKC, of whom a high proportion are minors who arrive in this country unaccompanied by an adult. Excellent relationships are evident between children looked after and their social workers, who are tenacious and unstinting in their pursuit of the best possible outcomes for these children from their journey through care. This exemplary level of service could be further strengthened by better use of independent visitors.

Outstanding services for children looked after are characterised by robust arrangements in place for reviewing care plans by a dedicated team of independent reviewing officers (IROs), thorough assessment and monitoring of the health of children looked after, particularly those placed out of borough, and exemplary attention to the diverse cultural and identity needs of children looked after.

Highly effective planning for permanence is a major strength of the organisation. Outstanding services are provided to children looked after for whom permanence is to be achieved through adoption.

An exemplary service is delivered to young people leaving or about to leave care. The Independence Support Team (IST) is in touch with almost all care leavers, most of whom are in suitable accommodation and 75% of whom are in employment, education or training. This is well above the national average.

Significant economies of scale, and shared services of the highest quality are achieved by tri-borough arrangements with Westminster City and Hammersmith and Fulham councils. Dedicated teams ensure that support and expertise of the highest quality is available on functions such as workforce development and performance management. A talented and highly capable commissioning team ensures that considerable additional resources available in this affluent area are effectively brokered to provide additionality to the wide range of existing services to children and their families.

Contents

Executive summary	2
The local authority	5
Information about this local authority area	5
Children looked after in this area	6
Recommendations	5
Summary for children and young people	8
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	9
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	19
Leadership, management and governance	36
The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)	42
Executive summary	42
Recommendations	43
Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board	43
Information about this inspection	50

The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates two children's homes. Both were judged to be good in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding was in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

Local leadership

- The DCS has been in post since 2011.
- The DCS is the executive DCS for the tri-borough, which comprises RBKC, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since April 2012.
- The LSCB is shared between the tri-orough of Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 27,769 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in RBKC. This is 17.8% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 24.8% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 26% (the national average is 16%)
 - in secondary schools is 20% (the national average is 14%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 39% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Mixed and Black and Black British.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:

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 primary schools is 54% (the national average is 19%)
- in secondary schools is 48% (the national average is 15%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31 December 2015, 977 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a decrease from 1,105 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 December 2015, 59 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 61 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 December 2015, four children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from one at 31 March 2015.
- Since the last inspection, two serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted. One serious case review has been completed and one was ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 December 2015, 112 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 42 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 105 (38 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2015. Of this number:
 - 87 (78%) live outside the local authority area
 - 14 live in residential children's homes, of whom six (43%) live out of the local authority area
 - six live in residential special schools³, all of whom live out of the local authority area
 - 78 live with foster families, of whom 68 (87%) live out of the local authority area
 - five live with parents, of whom three (60%) live out of the local authority area
 - 35 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Since April 2015:
 - there have been four adoptions
 - two children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 52 children ceased to be looked after, of whom none subsequently returned to be looked after

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

- 15 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
- two children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Recommendations

1. Review out-of-hours arrangements to ensure that children and young people are offered a standard of practice consistent with daytime services (page 12, paragraph 17).
2. Engage partner agencies in ensuring that strategy discussions where risk of harm is suspected are always swift and take place on a multi-agency basis (page 12, paragraph 18).
3. Collate information drawn from return home interviews of children who go missing from home to identify patterns and trends and assist disruption activity (page 16, paragraph 34).
4. Increase access to and take up of independent visitors so that young people looked after who meet the criteria can benefit from additional support and social interaction with suitable adults (page 23, paragraph 57).

Summary for children and young people

- Senior leaders in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea make sure that children, young people and their families receive the right help at the right time so that they are safe. If you are a child who needs help and protection or to be looked after, this is one of the best places in the country to live.
- Children and young people are helped by social workers who do not give up on them. Social workers are good at finding out what needs to be done to help families to change. The whole family receives support, making sure that everybody who needs help gets it.
- If a plan of support is needed, it is worked out with children and young people fully involved. The same social worker supports families through the various stages of children's social care services to ensure that families do not have to tell their story many times and start again with new social workers.
- Children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and who go missing from home or care are given the help needed to keep them safe. Senior leaders ensure that everyone is working together to protect these children.
- Children looked after live with skilled carers who go the extra mile to make sure that their needs are met. All professionals make sure that these children's parents are still a large part of their child's life. They are involved in decisions, planning for the future and seeing their children as often as possible.
- When children need to be adopted, they are quickly found a suitable family, who will care for them in the future. Children are given life story books and other memorabilia to help them to remember their life journey.
- Young people leaving the care system are helped and supported by familiar social workers or by specialist staff, to ensure a good start into adulthood. Care leavers do well in education or training and all their health needs are met. Personal advisers make sure that young people have somewhere safe and suitable to live.
- Senior managers are constantly looking at ways to help and protect children and young people sooner rather than later. They have exciting ideas about how to do this. Senior managers also make sure that all staff receive good training to ensure that the support that they offer is excellent.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children and young people identified as requiring help and protection receive a swift, responsive and effective service that protects them from harm. Inspectors saw evidence of consistently good, well-coordinated practice across all services. Focus on Practice enables effective relationships between workers and families to flourish, while managing risks.</p> <p>Children benefit from committed, enthusiastic and well-trained social workers who are well motivated to deliver creative and effective interventions that support children and their families, while managing risk. Very low caseloads enable workers to provide a solid, individualised whole-family approach. Advanced and specialist practitioners and family therapists embedded in locality teams facilitate case reflection. They mentor and guide social workers, and provide effective direct work in helping families to focus on solutions to their problems.</p> <p>Early-help services are a significant strength, providing comprehensive and far-reaching services that enable children and families to access the right service at the right time, thus avoiding the need for statutory services.</p> <p>Comprehensive and analytical social work assessments effectively identify risks and needs. Through the use of an evaluated national model, risks, strengths and complicating factors are understood well, resulting in the provision of appropriate help for children and families. Family histories are well documented and used well in order to understand the experiences of children and young people. However, strategy discussions are not always timely, nor do they involve all relevant partners.</p> <p>Good-quality child in need and child protection plans robustly support successful interventions that keep children as their central focus. Social work practice is patient, tenacious and respectful. The quality of social work practice is consistently good or outstanding, and demonstrates effective and thoughtful engagement with families.</p> <p>Comprehensive additional consideration is given to children with specific needs, such as those at risk of female genital mutilation , sexual exploitation and going missing. Children benefit from swift identification of risk, and effective multi-agency arrangements ensure that they are safe and that their needs are met.</p> <p>Management oversight is a clear strength. Social workers receive regular, reflective supervision providing clear direction and a shared ownership of risk from front line to senior management.</p>	

Inspection findings

5. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) has significantly invested in and prioritised early-help and prevention services to families, and these are clearly making a positive difference to children's lives. By adopting a systemic, whole-family approach and working to a shared vision through the Focus on Practice model, RBKC has achieved early support, early change and early improvement in families' lives. Confident, knowledgeable, well-trained and supported practitioners deliver highly effective early-help services.
6. An extensive and far-reaching integrated early-help offer includes dedicated early-help teams, children's centres, Troubled Families, Families Forward and a range of other impressive initiatives focusing on families that need targeted help. An effective focus on achieving positive outcomes is rooted within early-help services. For example, each family member is asked to complete an outcome-based assessment of their needs. This informs an overall assessment of their need for help, and enables practitioners and families to know when intervention has been successful.
7. Thorough analysis of the services offered by children's centres resulted in the development of the Best Start in Life programme. This multi-agency programme meets the identified additional needs of parents accessing universal services, such as nursery provision or stay and play. Children's centres also offer targeted support to individual families. They use local intelligence and data to identify vulnerable groups, such as families negatively affected by housing benefit reforms. Volunteering, adult learning and Pathways to Work programmes are further strengths of the provision offered by children's centres.
8. A very large number of children are receiving help at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risks of problems escalating at a later stage. Scrutiny of RBKC's own figures demonstrates that referrals to early-help services have risen year on year, with last year's increase standing at 22%. Services are co-located with social work teams, and this supports a shared understanding of thresholds and promotes a culture of working together to meet families' needs. Early-help practitioners have a mixed skill set, caseloads are very low at an average of eight families, and designated specialists provide families with effective support to ensure that children fully benefit from the services offered.
9. Good-quality assessments and effective plans and interventions mean that families' identified needs for early help are well met. Workers in early-help services are tenacious in their work with families. Their highly motivated and flexible approach ensures that families receive effective services that provide the right help at the right time. The need for escalation to social work services is, therefore, effectively prevented in a large majority of cases. At the time of the inspection, the step-up rate to social care was 15%, with a re-referral rate of just 6%. This is very low and further evidence that families are getting the right help at the earliest opportunity.

10. Sophisticated prevention initiatives are under development within all early-help services. For example, children's centres use multi-agency meetings to share local intelligence and to target services to meet need. An exciting and ambitious project, which is part of the Focus on Practice programme, is attempting to predict, by analysing data from various sources, which young people are more likely to be late entries into the care system. The offer of targeted support is then given to children and families at the earliest opportunity.
11. Children and families in need of specialist help and support can access social care services directly and quickly through six locality-based, and one hospital social care team. Managers report that workers know their locality and the services within it very well, and this enables appropriate services to be swiftly provided. Cases of children or young people requiring additional support identified by the police are managed directly through the tri-borough Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). All contacts with social care are regarded as referrals, and are therefore considered by a qualified duty social worker. Inspectors observed that decision making at the point of duty was undertaken swiftly, and that some cases were appropriately referred to the MASH for additional information gathering before a final decision was made. Depending on the seriousness of the concern, the duty social worker rates referrals to the MASH as blue, red, amber, or green (BRAG), and the BRAG rating indicates the deadline for checks to be completed, which minimises the delay in meeting children's needs.
12. Children and young people benefit from an effective multi-agency response to their additional needs through the MASH. The co-location of staff in the MASH enables highly effective gathering of information, which social workers filter and analyse to inform their recommendations for action. Strong management oversight ensures that these MASH recommendations are safe, with appropriate BRAG ratings indicating the level of response required by social care. However, the service provided is akin to a multi-agency information-sharing centre rather than a hub for decision making. In a small number of cases seen, this built in delay. For example, in one case reviewed by inspectors the police referral was slow to reach the MASH. The MASH checks then took longer than timescales designated by the BRAG and this in turn led to a delay in the local authority being able to act.
13. Prompt action by duty members of staff in the locality social work teams means that all recommendations are responded to swiftly once they are received from the MASH. Comprehensive managerial collaboration and senior management oversight ensures that thresholds for child protection enquiries or step down to early intervention services are correctly applied. This ensures that children and young people receive the right help quickly. Social workers see children, young people and their families promptly, and effectively identify a plan of work suitable to their needs. In some cases, depending upon their complexity, more detailed assessments are undertaken. Any decisions relating to assessments and all assessment outcomes are subject to strict management oversight and scrutiny.

14. Swift identification of concerns about children's safety meant that decisions to commence child protection enquiries were appropriately made in all cases seen by inspectors. This is a very high level of social work practice. However, strategy discussions are not always timely, nor do they consistently involve appropriate partners. In some cases observed by inspectors, social workers used information that they received from partners through a telephone discussion and agreed actions through a phone conversation with the police. In others, strategy discussions solely involved a telephone discussion with the police (Recommendation).
15. The dedicated tri-borough emergency duty team provides services for children and families out of hours. However, a single social worker on duty at any one time limits the level of service it is able to provide. The team responds to crises and takes immediate action to keep children safe. However, inspectors saw examples of children placed in care without being seen by a social worker, with carers receiving no written information to help them to care effectively for the child. RBKC accepts this as an area for further development (Recommendation).
16. Social workers working alongside families to meet their identified needs is a significant strength of RBKC. The locality teams' structures enable all social workers to undertake the full range of children's social work for each individual child, potentially from duty referral to adoption. Caseloads are by design very low, averaging eight families per social worker. This creates an environment in which good social work can flourish. Consequently, children, young people and their families benefit from long-term, stable and meaningful relationships with their social worker. Advanced and specialist practitioners and family therapists embedded within each team provide additional mentoring and guidance for social workers, as well as effective direct work helping families to focus on solutions to their problems.
17. The voice of the child comes through strongly in assessments and plans and routinely influences decision making. Children are customarily seen and seen alone during assessments, and the way that this is consistently achieved is very good social work practice. Social workers devise innovative and creative ways of engaging children to obtain their views, including the use of puppets and comics. Social workers are tenacious and persistent when building relationships with children, young people and their wider families. They make numerous and varied attempts to engage with absent fathers, and where they are successful, fathers and wider family members are productively engaged with assessments and the delivery of services. This is exceptionally strong social work practice.

18. Comprehensive and analytical written assessments are of good quality and effectively identify risks and needs in almost all cases that were seen. Based on an evaluated national model, assessments meticulously identify risks, strengths and areas of uncertainty. They consistently result in appropriate responses, and the provision of appropriate services to manage the assessed level of risk. Social workers undertaking assessments take into account previous social work involvement and family history, making good use of chronologies to understand the child's lived experience. The cumulative impact of harm by neglect is recognised, and chronologies are kept up to date to provide historical context that suitably informs decision making.
19. To facilitate Focus on Practice, RBKC has 'freedoms and flexibilities' from national guidance of 45 days to complete an assessment, and 15 days to initial child protection conferences (ICPC). This was approved by the Secretary of State for Education and means that RBKC is not bound by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 in this respect. Perusal of RBKC's own figures indicates that, in the last 12 months, 76% of assessments were completed within a 45-day timescale. Therefore this dispensation is used for only a small minority of cases. Inspectors saw strict management oversight and a clear rationale recorded underpinning each decision.
20. Robust management decision making supports children's safety. To provide independent oversight and to make decision making consistent, a family support child protection adviser (FSCPA) reviews each child's circumstances after the team manager has quality assured the assessment and made a recommendation to proceed to an ICPC. Social workers immediately put in place supportive services as risks and needs emerge, rather than waiting for their assessment to be completed. A high number of child protection enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 therefore do not lead to a multi-agency ICPC, with only 20% (2014–2015) progressing to conference. According to RBKC's own figures, the multi-agency partnership has highly successfully and in a carefully planned way reduced the rates of children subject to a child protection plan from 35.8 per 10,000 (2013–2014) to 22.9 per 10,000 children (2014–2015).
21. By keeping children as their central focus, good quality child in need and child protection plans robustly support good quality interventions in a large majority of cases. Plans are suitably specific and timely. Outcomes and measurements of success are clearly defined, enabling families to understand what is required of them and to recognise success when it happens. Plans identify who is responsible for delivering each part of the plan and encourage the family to take ownership of actions to improve their children's lives. Contingency planning is evident in each case file, and social workers explain clearly to families what the potential consequences may be if change is not achieved. However, this was not crystallised as part of the written child protection plan in a very small number of cases, and this could potentially leave some families unclear about the consequences of a failure to change.

22. Child-focused ICPCs and review conferences have good partner engagement and participation. This ensures that they are effective fora in which to share information, assess risk and need, and develop a coherent plan to protect children. The use of plain language ensures that families understand what is of concern and what needs to change. FSCPAs are effective in chairing conferences and they engage well with parents. FSCPAs identify areas of good practice and escalate practice concerns within relevant partner agencies. However, this information is not routinely collated to inform and improve practice standards, which is a missed opportunity. Children and young people have access to an independent advocate so that they can attend conferences and express their views. Although the take-up rate for this service is low, RBKC is taking steps to improve communication between social workers and advocates before conferences, to promote their use.
23. Management oversight of practice is a clear strength of the organisation. In all cases reviewed by inspectors, supervision is regular and decisive, providing clear direction and preventing drift. Recommendations from previous supervisions are reviewed, new information is shared and clear decisions are made. Managers' role in quality assuring assessments is evident from case files, with supervision providing clear guidance on progressing the case. Social workers told inspectors that they feel well supported by their line managers and senior managers alike. They receive comprehensive monthly supervision from line managers, and can seek further support and guidance from advanced and specialist practitioners, and family therapists who provide additional case reflection. The Focus on Practice model is highly valued by social workers as it allows additional group reflection sessions. Inspectors saw examples of regular and ongoing senior manager- and director-level oversight and planning in complex cases. This makes social workers feel safe when managing risk, and they describe an exemplary working culture where risk is 'shared' with senior managers.
24. An exceptionally wide range of services is delivered to families subject to child in need and child protection plans, who benefit from collaborative commissioning within the tri-borough as well as local interventions. Many services are highly innovative, such as the tri-borough Action for Change programme that is working successfully with an identified group of parents to break the cycle of children being repeatedly removed from their care. This project is highly valued by those parents, who stated that it gave them hope and was 'helping us to be better parents.' Similarly, the Families Forward Team provides highly effective services to support children, young people and their families on the edges of care.

25. Well-understood arrangements for the identification, intervention and management of significant issues of harm by adults are effectively considered within formal settings, such as multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) meetings. These meetings are effective in sharing information, identifying risks and developing appropriate responses to protect individuals. In cases seen by inspectors, the use of MARAC had effectively engaged partners in managing risk to adult victims of domestic abuse, while ensuring that the safety of their children remains paramount.
26. Good use is made by social workers of a range of resources to support families where domestic abuse is an identified issue. Significant efforts are made to engage perpetrators who are enabled to work with family therapists to help establish safe and positive relationships with their children. The local authority appropriately identified a gap in commissioned services, as existing services only provide interventions to perpetrators who recognise that they need help. Consequently, specialised domestic abuse workers are being embedded to extend further the reach of locality teams.
27. Comprehensive consideration is given to children with specific needs such as risk of female genital mutilation, risk of accusations of spirit possession, risk of honour-based violence and risk of radicalisation, with well-coordinated tri-borough arrangements ensuring an effective response from specialist staff. For example, a creative pilot across the tri-borough embeds child protection advisers within maternity clinics to raise awareness sensitively and to approach women subjected to or at risk of female genital mutilation. When vulnerable women have given birth to or are expecting a female child, this triggers an appropriate MASH check and specialised social work assessment. This response has been highly effective in identifying a number of children at risk, and children are protected through subsequent child protection investigations where these are assessed as necessary.
28. Innovative and highly effective adolescent at risk meetings are held when children and young people are engaging in risk-taking behaviour. These meetings follow an evaluated national model by effectively bringing together key partners to identify and plan strategies for reducing risk. On case files sampled by inspectors, these meetings were successful in managing risk and, where risk could not be managed this led to decisive action to protect the young person. This is outstanding social work practice.

29. In all cases sampled of child sexual exploitation and children who go missing, risk is clearly identified and a broad range of services is used to work with young people to reduce risk. Senior managers have a clear and highly focused line of sight of children at risk. They receive weekly reports from both the missing children's coordinator and from the child sexual exploitation lead strategic officer. This officer oversees all cases of exploitation, provides social workers with guidance and support and, where necessary, chairs multi-agency meetings to manage risk. RBKC has recognised the need to analyse trends in the source of referrals, identify any partners who are not systematically reporting children who go missing from home, and appropriately target awareness raising. For children at risk of child sexual exploitation, the monthly multi-agency tri-borough missing and sexually exploited (MASE) meeting effectively identifies, maps, and tracks vulnerable young people, then intervenes to reduce risk. Inspectors saw impressive multi-agency analytical work using technology to identify a dangerous perpetrator linked to a number of vulnerable children. Such information informs police disruption activities and the meeting effectively monitors impact.
30. Dynamic and proactive intervention by RBKC successfully reduces sexual-exploitation risks associated with gang activity. The Tri-borough Integrated Gangs Unit, located within the MASH, uses outreach gang workers and a sexual exploitation specialist to work specifically with girls exposed to exploitation through gangs, the most prevalent form of exploitation in the area. An embedded analyst identifies trends and patterns, and enables prevention activities to focus on hotspots, which assists proactive early intervention and disruption. The level of gang-related violence has substantially reduced over a four-year period, demonstrating the highly effective impact of the unit's work.
31. Systematic monitoring by the children missing coordinator ensures that risk is assessed and that appropriate interventions are put in place. The local authority has focused its energy on ensuring that children receive a timely return home interview. However, in a small minority of cases, these were not always evident on children's files. Where children and young people refuse to engage, it is unclear how risks are identified and managed. To obtain good information from the return home interview, RBKC asks children and young people to identify who they would want to be interviewed by. RBKC recognises that they need to make more use of the intelligence from return home interviews to aggregate patterns and trends and identify hotspots (Recommendation).
32. The authority has well-established procedures for determining the whereabouts of children missing from education. Children removed from the school roll, whose destinations are not known or cannot be identified following reasonable enquiries, are tracked by the attendance (statutory action), child employment and children in entertainment, elective home education and children missing education, including exclusion from school (ACE) team which carries out checks including visits to last known addresses. Of the 51 such children referred during the 2015/16 autumn term, 88% cases had been resolved and closed at the time of the inspection.

33. Referrals to the Tri-borough Alternative Provision (TBAP) service are appropriately made for children permanently excluded. These are managed well by the ACE team and appropriate placements of 25 hours' education per week are secured promptly within six days of exclusion. Attendance of pupils in alternative provision was good at 91% in 2014/15. Managed moves of pupils at risk of exclusion are administered well by schools, and numbers of permanent exclusions are therefore low and reducing. Fixed-term exclusions are lower than the national average for all schools. TBAP also provides alternative provision on a dual-registration basis, with schools appropriately ensuring that pupils receive 25 hours' provision per week.
34. The ACE team works well in establishing working relationships with families who opt for home education, and almost all accept a visit to ensure that children's work is of an appropriate standard. At the time of the inspection, 36 children were electively home educated, half of whom were previously attending school. Only once in the last three years has recourse to attendance proceedings been necessary.
35. The local authority is a 'Prevent' priority area. The channel process is a strength across the tri-borough in identifying individuals who are at risk, assessing the nature and extent of that risk, and developing support plans to divert people away from terrorism and extremism. The Tri-borough 'Prevent' Steering Group provides local oversight with representatives from a range of shared council services and external partner organisations. The 'Prevent' team receives all radicalisation concerns identified through children's services, and coordinates a response that may include a referral to channel panel if risks are established.
36. Well-coordinated strategic oversight of children living in private fostering arrangements is delivered by a knowledgeable, dedicated worker who undertakes all assessments and offers continuing support to children and families. In cases sampled, RBKC meets its statutory requirements and additional effective and innovative awareness raising takes place on a regular basis, including targeted work with GPs, language schools, independent schools and border authority links. This has led to an increase in enquiries and referrals in relation to private fostering arrangements. Awareness raising campaigns are responsive to language differences and diversity, and appropriately raise awareness of potential links to female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and honour-based violence.

37. RBKC appropriately assesses all 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless. Social workers inform young people of their right to become looked after, and suitable accommodation is found when they are unable to return home. The local authority uses bed and breakfast accommodation as a last resort for short periods of time, although inspectors saw an example of bed and breakfast used for a period of two weeks and this is not appropriate. Although they are seen regularly, no formal risk assessments are completed for this very vulnerable group of young people. Potential risks are therefore unknown in respect of the environment that they are living in or any additional steps needed to keep them safe. RBKC acknowledges that it does not hold general data on the number of 16- to 17-year-olds who present as homeless. It is therefore difficult for the authority to know what has been effective in reuniting families, as well as to ensure that there is sufficient appropriate accommodation for this group of young people.
38. Robust and effective tri-borough arrangements for the management of allegations against adults in a position of trust have been revised and put firmly in place since October 2014. The response to allegations is appropriate, and enquiries are purposeful with good communication between the designated officer and partner agencies.
39. Respect for equality and diversity is a particular strength of RBKC services and is clearly, carefully and sensitively considered throughout services delivered to children, young people and their families. Workers understand very well issues of diversity, and this positively impacts on the work that they do with children. Social workers promote positive cultural identities, and explore faith and religious beliefs. Family therapists are used to excellent effect to understand cultural tensions between children and their parents, and explore family-focused solutions. Where necessary, the use of interpreters has facilitated relationship building with the family. Social work allocation considers, and is sensitive to, the gender needs of children lacking a male role model.
40. RBKC is in parts very affluent and home to a number of the least deprived council wards in England. Where concerns are identified for children of powerful and privileged parents, risks are managed very well. Social workers serving the locality state that 'child protection is child protection no matter who the family is'. Social workers and managers demonstrate a clear understanding of the level of sensitivity in these cases and potential barriers to engagement and information sharing, for example from private health and education services that are not LSCB partners, as well as from potential media interest. Social workers are confident and well supported to protect children who live in privileged circumstances and ensure that the child is at the centre of any assessments undertaken and interventions made.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Outstanding

Summary

Children and young people looked after in RBKC receive an outstanding service. Practice is consistently of a very high standard and this leads to positive outcomes for all children looked after. Case records provide a clear history of each child's journey through care. A well-embedded, whole-family approach underpins all interventions with families. Social workers know their children extremely well and develop close relationships with them. Highly effective risk management processes and extensive support services enable children to remain safely at home with their families. Timely decisions about when to bring children into care are always based on very robust assessments. Social workers make significant efforts to identify alternative carers within the extended family network, and the extensive use of family group conferences supports this process.

The vast majority of children looked after live with carers who are tenacious in offering consistent care. Children with complex emotional and behavioural needs receive highly effective support from a variety of therapeutic options, and this promotes stability. Health needs of children looked after are extraordinarily well met by the dedicated looked after children's nurse, who ensures that services are provided by RBKC's health partners even when children are placed out of area. RBKC has a large proportion of children looked after who are unaccompanied minors, and the local authority has ensured that all of these children receive extremely effective and coordinated help and support from a highly knowledgeable, specialist team.

All children looked after benefit from rigorous care planning processes. Plans are progressed swiftly and appropriately and in the best interests of the child. In all cases seen, IROs offer meticulous oversight via timely, regular reviews of the care plan. Children looked after do not routinely benefit from access to independent visitors and for some children, who have no contact with family, this would provide an additional layer of support. Appropriate consideration of planning for permanence is undertaken for the vast majority of children looked after at their second review.

Family finding undertaken for children placed for adoption is vigorous. Substantial individual work with children facilitates effective matching with adoptive parents. Although the numbers of children leaving care through adoption are low, they constitute a high proportion of a small care population. Well-resourced services provide excellent support to care leavers that prepares them effectively for independence. Care and time is taken by social workers and personal advisers to develop consistent, trusting relationships with young people. Almost all care leavers are in appropriate accommodation and are prepared well for independence.

Inspection findings

41. Services for children looked after in RBKC are outstanding. Some exemplary services for children looked after are centralised and amalgamated as a result of tri-borough arrangements. This achieves economies of scale, improvements in the consistency and quality of practice, flexibility in the use of resources, and an enhanced profile across the London region. Examples of excellence include the tri-borough adoption and fostering service, a connected person's team, the independent review service, legal services for children, the management and scrutiny of permanence arrangements and use of the public law outline (PLO), and placement commissioning for children looked after.
42. Highly effective management of a planned reduction in the numbers of children looked after in RBKC is supported by continuously effective early-help interventions and edge of care support, together with a firmly established ethos of risk assessment and management. As a result, the population of children looked after has fallen from 140 in 2011–2012 to 105 in 2014–2015. The rate of 38 per 10,000 population is now well below the England average (60 per 10,000) and statistical neighbours' performance (56 per 10,000). The reduction enables children to remain with their families, and extensive support services make it safe for them to do so.
43. A highly detailed understanding of the profile of their children looked after enables RBKC to understand fully any patterns and trends that have impacted upon the current cohort. RBKC's own figures show almost one third of the looked after population are unaccompanied minors, originating from a wide range of countries. These children benefit from extremely effective and coordinated help and support from a dedicated team, which swiftly ensures that they have access to health services and legal advice. As a result, their life opportunities are significantly enhanced. Identifying appropriate placements to meet such a wide variety of cultural needs is a challenge, but inspectors saw examples of carers and social workers tenaciously ensuring that they could meet the diverse needs of almost all children.
44. Comprehensive and thorough assessments are undertaken in almost all cases prior to the decision to look after children. Assessments carefully evaluate risks and work with the strengths of the family to identify potential alternatives to care. This ensures that only those children who need to be are looked after. Parallel planning is rigorously and systematically applied. Family group conferences (FGCs) are used swiftly, both to inform care planning and to identify extended family members who are willing to care for the child. Viability assessments are clear and of a good quality, with appropriate management oversight and sign off. Consistent management oversight is enabled by tri-borough arrangements where legal proceedings are required.

45. Very effective and proactive monitoring of use of the PLO is undertaken by the tri-borough care proceedings manager, ensuring timely placements for children and effective reporting to the strategic tri-borough management team. According to their own figures, timeliness in care proceedings in RBKC for the current year stands at 26 weeks, and further improvement is anticipated as longstanding cases are concluded. Independent scrutiny and analysis of delay is provided by the University of East Anglia, and this enables further targeted improvement in timeliness. Delays are extensively tracked, and most can be reasonably attributed to complex or international cases.
46. Feedback on tri-borough social workers' performance in court is excellent. The Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) reports that the tri-borough is 'leading the way' in the region. Cafcass also state that in RBKC the quality of pre-proceedings' work is very high. Parents know their rights. Letters sent before proceedings set out in plain language the concerns of the professionals, and identify what actions the parents need to take. Continual reinforcement in all meetings relating to the child means that parents know clearly what is expected of them and the potential consequences if expectations are not met.
47. High-quality statements for court result in robust care plans. Integral to this process is the Multi-agency Family Assessment Service (MFAS), which provides comprehensive and evaluative multi-disciplinary parenting assessments to inform evidence-based future planning. Feedback from a parent about this process was extremely positive, as she felt fully engaged and, more importantly, did not feel prejudged.
48. Sustained trusting relationships with social workers who are consistently available to them evidently benefit children looked after. All children looked after see their social worker regularly and almost all are seen alone. They have extensive opportunities to express their views and to contribute meaningfully to their plans. This is an outstanding level of social work practice.
49. Consistent application of thresholds in all casework seen demonstrates strong collaborative working between all agencies to progress children's care plans, and this is a significant strength of the organisation. Social workers and multi-disciplinary professionals are tenacious in engaging with parents, and recognise the vital importance of fully consulting with significant adults in the life of a child looked after. In almost all cases, this leads to effective working partnerships. For instance, persistent and continuous nurturing of a relationship with a mother, in one case seen, led to the successful rehabilitation of two children, despite an initial negative prognosis.

50. Carefully considered decisions to return children home are made with a clear rationale, involvement of the IRO, ratified by senior managers, and in all cases sampled reunification was the right decision. Extensive bespoke support packages are used to meet the needs of the whole family, and to ensure the success of the return home plan. These include access to family therapists and commissioning of specialist services where required.
51. The highest strategic priority is given to achieving permanence across the tri-borough to ensure that all aspects of permanence are developed, embedded and improved upon. The Permanence Board, together with a dedicated permanence coordinator, oversees a broad range of initiatives: for example, clear permanence guidance for staff, a sub-clause in independent fostering agency contracts, allowing older children to stay put, and assistance for social workers with children's permanence reports.
52. Early permanence planning is very effectively tracked by the tri-borough permanence coordinator, some commencing even before birth. Permanence planning meetings, overseen by managers, take place regularly for children looked after and young people, so that they are matched in a timely way with the most appropriate carers. Within RBKC, in a very high number of cases the decision for permanence is discussed and made at the second review, although recording of this highly important decision in a child's life is not always explicit in review records.
53. IROs in RBKC know the children whom they review very well. Reviews are almost always timely and RBKC has the best performance across the tri-borough at 99.7% for 2014–2015. Highly comprehensive reviews clearly focus on the needs of children looked after. They lead to specific, measurable and timed recommendations that drive the care plan, from which the intended outcomes are very clear. Prior to a review, in almost all cases the IRO meets with the child to gain their views, and in all cases seen they undertake mid-point monitoring to ensure that the plan is progressing appropriately.
54. Highly positive IRO practice is supported by manageable caseloads, effective tri-borough training, including action learning sets, and good links with managers and staff to keep abreast of practice developments. IROs are enabled to get to know children and young people very well and to advocate for them, providing additional reviews in more complex situations. Identified areas for development include improving the numbers of young people who chair their own reviews, and a more innovative focus on overseeing young people returning home and exiting care proceedings via supervision orders.

55. The performance of the Independent Reviewing Service across the tri-borough is very high. In 2014–2015, the vast majority of children had regular reviews of their care plans (96%) and 97% of young people participated in their reviews. There is a culture across the tri-borough of issues being resolved either at a very early stage or via a system of informal and formal challenges, which can lead to changes in care plans for children and young people. Reviews do not routinely appoint independent visitors where children are eligible and would benefit from having a suitable adult in their life (Recommendation).
56. The comprehensive tri-borough sufficiency strategy demonstrates a sophisticated understanding and approach to the placement needs of the whole population of children looked after, and work is progressing on identified future developments to enhance placement choice. A well-established and experienced placements team ensures careful planning and sensitive matching for children looked after where matching is not possible within the in-house family placement service. Children are appropriately placed with their brothers and sisters, and have carefully arranged contact with their families. Strong and effective relationships exist with independent providers, and the tri-borough has been influential in commissioning tailored placements for young people with specialised needs.
57. Highly creative use is made of foster carers with vacancies in supporting other placements, for example accompanying children and young people to school and contact where their existing carer is unable to do so, or providing cover where a foster carer is also acting as a mentor for young people involved in drug and gangland culture. As a result of being amalgamated, the tri-borough fostering service has more in-house placement choice, with wider flexibility to utilise staff, resources and carers. An ambitious and proactive fostering recruitment programme commenced in October 2015. This followed gaps identified by the tri-borough service in in-house placement choice for young people with challenging behaviour, family groups, children with disabilities and children requiring long-term fostering or permanence.
58. Social workers sensitively and thoroughly assess prospective foster carers, focusing on their strengths and areas for development. A well-organised and independent tri-borough connected person's team is in place to respond in a timely and thorough way to all connected persons and special guardianship assessments.
59. Good support and training are offered to foster carers and connected persons. Retention of foster carers is therefore strong. All carers interviewed spoke very highly about their supervising social workers. Shared care in fostering is used in a child-focused way to support placement stability. Delegated authority is in place for foster carers to take some day-to-day decisions so that children and young people can easily participate in the activities that they enjoy.

60. A dedicated family-finding social worker is allocated when children and young people are not immediately placed for permanence. Inspectors saw evidence of appropriate and careful matching of children to long-term or permanent carers, and every effort being made to find the appropriate cultural and ethnic match. Children and young people are helped to form strong attachments with their carers via appropriate therapeutic support. Life story books reviewed by inspectors were consistently of a good standard, with one that was exceptional.
61. The vast majority of children looked after benefit from living in stable and settled placements with consistent care. Latest published figures show that the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements was 9% during the year ending 31 March 2014, which was better than the England average of 11%. In relation to children looked after in the same placement for at least two years, the latest published data show the performance for the year ending 31 March 2014 as 69%, which is slightly better than the national average of 67%, and recent local data for quarter 3 for 2015–2016 shows a further improvement to 76%.
62. An extraordinarily robust care planning process ensures that children’s plans are specific and measurable. Priority is given to meeting the child’s needs rather than just the completion of formal paperwork. Children’s plans are routinely considered and recommendations tracked in supervision sessions, and in all meetings related to the child this leads to actions to progress the care plan that are tracked to completion.
63. Children receive ongoing support to maintain significant relationships. Contact arrangements are the subject of regular reviews to ensure that they remain positive experiences for the child looked after. Strenuous efforts are made to trace absent parents and to seek their views when it is safe to do so. Social workers ensure that, even when parents have stopped engaging in contact, they provide parents with regular updates to try to encourage communication.
64. All children and young people receive high-quality health support from a well-organised and coordinated service working in partnership with all local health services. The looked after children’s nurse rigorously maintains oversight of all children’s health progress, no matter where they live. The service knows all the children and young people well, so that their individual health needs receive appropriate and prompt interventions when needed.

65. The routine completion of initial health assessments leads to thorough and well-considered health plans. All children placed within or out of the area have their initial assessment in RBKC. This ensures both close monitoring and health needs assessments of a consistently high quality. Performance in relation to annual health reviews stands at 100% completed within timescales, and all children and young people undertake strengths and difficulties questionnaires as part of their annual assessment. This close individual monitoring enables the swift provision of services when needed. Impressively, when children looked after who live out of the borough develop a need for a specialist health assessment, they return to the borough for assured timely assessments, so that there are no delays in health service provision. This is highly effective corporate parenting.
66. Clear pathways can be accessed when children and young people looked after have identified needs relating to drugs and alcohol, sexual health, parenting, low self-esteem or are at risk of child sexual exploitation. Specific partnerships and local agreements ensure that the unique health needs of unaccompanied minors receive prompt provision of services to meet their particular needs.
67. A well-led virtual school effectively holds schools to account, and this is improving the educational outcomes of children and young people looked after. It works well with schools both within and outside the borough, and RBKC benefits from the expertise and experience available through the wider tri-borough arrangements. At the time of this inspection, 98% of children were attending good or better schools with none attending an inadequate school. The virtual school attends the Care Placement and Planning Group where the educational needs of the individual child and the quality of schools are given very high priority when considering care placements. It also provides one-to-one tuition to help unaccompanied minors to prepare for school if they become looked after during school holidays, and it provides weekly English tuition throughout the year to boost language skills.
68. The large majority of personal education plans (PEPs) are at least good and some are exceptional. The virtual school provides training to ensure that social workers have the skills and knowledge to question schools on the improvement targets and progress of children looked after. The virtual school maintains an accurate database of children's attendance and progress, enabling effective tracking and prompt intervention through weekly child in focus meetings when individual children pose a cause for concern.
69. The virtual school holds the pupil premium funding, which helps to ensure that it is used to support children looked after according to individual needs. Targeted support is particularly effective in helping children to improve their English and mathematics, and a range of effective projects and initiatives encourage foster carers to support children's education and to encourage children to read. For example, children receive carefully selected, age-appropriate books on a termly basis, based on children's interests, which they read with their foster carers.

70. At each educational key stage, the numbers of children looked after, who have been looked after for 12 months or more, are low, making statistical comparisons difficult. Over three quarters of children looked after in the borough have some form of special educational needs. During the last academic year, the cohort of pupils at Key Stage 1 did not achieve national standards but they did make good progress, and one achieved the targets set in reading, writing and mathematics. The targeted use of pupil premium funding led to well-coordinated support for pupils at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
71. The virtual school supports young people well to progress to education or training at the end of year 11. In 2014–2015, the entire cohort progressed into some form of education or training, with almost all completing their courses. Young people aged 16 to 18 are now monitored more closely by the virtual school through monthly education, employment and training panel meetings. Weekly child in focus meetings identify young people who need targeted 1:1 support through designated youth services. At the time of the inspection, there was only one pupil in alternative provision within a mainstream school, with none on reduced timetables or missing education.
72. Overall attendance for children looked after has been 88% for the last two academic years, although unauthorised absence is higher for pupils placed outside the authority. The virtual school tracks attendance daily, and this enables the virtual school to review attendance support and plan alternative action more swiftly when concerns about individual pupils become apparent.
73. The Advocacy and Participation Service supports the Children in Care Council to provide valuable opportunities for young people to represent the views of children looked after, and to discuss matters affecting them with the corporate parenting group. Topics of discussion include RBKC's pledge and the views of young people on matters, such as safeguarding and online safety.
74. Very robust individual risk management arrangements for children at risk of child sexual exploitation or who go missing lead to individualised support packages to alleviate concerns. The children-missing coordinator follows up with the allocated social workers when child looked after goes missing. In addition, the child's IRO receives notification of the missing episode and will ensure that a return home interview is undertaken and that the risks are evaluated. Inspectors saw evidence of very effective follow-up work and service provision during case tracking, which has led to significant reduction of risk for children where sexual exploitation is a feature of concern. In one case, the parent of a child at risk of sexual exploitation gave very positive feedback about the diversionary interventions provided that led to a significant reduction in risk, and a successful return home.

75. A wide variety of leisure activities is undertaken by children looked after and young people to enhance their social skills and to promote their interests. These include hobbies, as well as educational enrichment activities. Social workers regularly attend children's activities, such as concerts and awards ceremonies, and this helps further cement their positive relationships. In all cases, social workers spoken to take pride in the progress of their children and talked with relish of achievements made by children looked after.
76. Social workers are very culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of children and parents with diverse backgrounds. Robust assessment of diversity issues means that identified needs are well understood and promoted extremely well. The Children with Disabilities service is very well-resourced and children with learning difficulties and autism significantly benefit from the work of the Behaviour and Family Support Team, who work with families to manage challenging behaviour and keep children with them. As a result, RBKC has only three children placed in specialist residential placements, as the service is able to increase the confidence of parents and carers to manage such behaviours and to maintain children with a severe disability in their home environment.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is outstanding

77. Children looked after in RBKC benefit from an outstanding adoption service. Securing permanence through adoption is given a very high priority. Adoption is managed within an overarching tri-borough service and this arrangement is highly effective for RBKC's children looked after. A very innovative approach is both enabled and stimulated by sharing this strategic function. The arrangement provides both economies of scale in the use of scarce resources, and an environment of collective creativity that is demonstrated by consistently strong professional practice.
78. A comprehensive understanding of permanence planning ensures that the best permanence option is considered for children at the earliest possible stage. Adoption is considered for all children at this time. This way of working is threaded throughout the tri-borough's clear understanding of permanence, and adoption is given the highest priority. For example, this is demonstrated by the work of the Permanence Project, which is chaired by the DCS and ensures that proactive work is undertaken with the courts to secure agreement for family finding before a placement order is made.
79. A clear, well-analysed and sophisticated understanding of adoption practice and of the wider adoption market is demonstrated by managers of the adoption service. They routinely reflect upon and measure their performance against both national indicators and that of other London boroughs. A comprehensive range of tracking and monitoring systems for adoption performance includes detailed analysis of any issues affecting timeliness and an understanding of the needs of individual children.
80. Robust arrangements are in place to monitor the progress of children who are subject to a plan for adoption. Social workers, including senior managers, have a detailed knowledge of all children, what is happening for them and why. Progress made by individual children awaiting adoption is closely monitored and placement options are continuously explored.
81. Effective use of the adoption reform grant has driven improvement and created additional posts. For example, the move to appoint to the role of a permanence coordinator is highly insightful in improving adoption performance. Regular permanence planning meeting minutes demonstrate exceptional practice in the rigour and thought put into highly effective planning.
82. RBKC's own figures show that in comparison to the two other boroughs, the level of adoption activity over the past 12 months is relatively low in number, although proportional to the looked after population overall. Nine children have progressed through all or part of the adoption process. Five children have been successfully adopted, and active family finding is taking place for the four remaining children.

83. RBKC's adoption scorecard shows very good performance in two out of the three key indicators. Very high levels of performance are being achieved when the local authority receives court authority to place a child, and the time taken to match a child to an adoptive family averages 69 days, as against the national threshold of 125 days. Children who wait less than 18 months to move from care to an adoptive family show much improved performance at 67% achieved over the last three years. This is better than statistical neighbours at 50% and the England average of 51%. Time taken from children entering care to being placed with an adoptive family is less effective at 640 days set against the current threshold of 547 days, although this figure is affected by the time taken for a highly complex case set against the low numbers being adopted.
84. The tri-borough service is successful in recruiting adopters. Forty-six are awaiting a match, of whom 18 have been approved in the current year. The tri-borough ensures that adopters are available for inter-agency placements, and routinely uses the adoption register and other national matching fora for both children and adopters waiting.
85. Thorough assessments of prospective adopters are completed to a very high standard, providing clear analysis of the adopter's ability to meet an adopted child's needs. Adopters spoken to were very positive about the recruitment and assessment process. Delays in approval are mostly due to external issues, and the service is actively working to improve timeliness in adopter assessments. The impact of any delay has been minimal on adopters and children.
86. A very clear foster-to-adopt policy guides social work practice in the tri-borough, and results in early placements for permanence being made. Both foster-to-adopt and concurrent arrangements are discussed with every adopter, and the first concurrent adopter has recently been recruited. Some adopter assessments have been fast tracked to prevent delay, including a specific foster-to-adopt match that is a possibility for second-time adopters.
87. An extremely reflective and thoughtful service takes a proactive stance on new ways of working. This includes working with an external agency on recruitment, enhancing the capacity of adopters to meet children's support needs, and training and equipping adopters to feel confident. Thirteen mentors have been recruited across the tri-borough to support adopters from the outset of the recruitment process, and adopters spoke highly of the value that they place on the mentoring support offered.
88. Forty adopters across the tri-borough have undertaken therapeutic parenting training, and they reported that they feel more confident as a result. Innovative workshops have included the opportunity for adopters to work with a psychologist and to explore information that increases their openness when matching, particularly in relation to mental health issues.

89. The tri-borough fostering and adoption panel is well chaired by two separate chairs who bring a wealth of adoption and safeguarding experience. Very clear quality assurance processes are firmly in place and adopters spoken to confirm that the process is an exceptionally rigorous one. Prospective adopter reports and childpermanence reports are consistently very strong, with appropriate detail and a good level of analysis. Thorough and well-considered panel minutes and agency decision maker decisions in all cases demonstrate that both the panel and the decision-making processes work extremely well.
90. The thoughtful, reflective and self-critical adoption service routinely analyses any issues that impact negatively on performance and swiftly makes any adjustments required. For example, they noticed a slower application for adoption orders for children in inter-agency placements, once the family-finding worker had withdrawn. To address this, the service now ensures that the family finder remains involved until the adoption application has been submitted.
91. Comprehensive provision for birth parents is provided through an independent commissioned service. The service includes birth-parent counselling, support and advice including literacy help with letter box contact, and information sharing between an adopted child, their birth family and adoptive family. The service also supervises face-to-face contact between adopted children and birth parents where this has been assessed to be in the child's best interests.
92. Exceptionally strong adoption support comprises an impressive and effective range of provision. Adopters are highly aware of their entitlement to adoption support, and they spoke positively about the support offered. Adoption support plans were consistently good. The adoption support fund for individual children is used very well.
93. Children are extremely well supported to prepare them to live with their future families. Life story work is of a very high quality; it is clear, colourful and jargon free. Social workers are highly skilled in undertaking direct work with children, helping them to understand their histories, and enabling them to transfer their attachments to their new family. This allows children to settle quickly, with very low adoption disruptions. There have been only two in the last two years.

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

94. Services for care leavers in RBKC are outstanding. Excellent services are resourced very well, and a particularly strong feature is the care and time taken by social workers and personal advisers to develop trusting and caring relationships with young people. Personal advisers are confident in their work and are supported well to improve their practice. Almost all care leavers are in appropriate accommodation and are prepared well for independence. The IST is in contact with almost all care leavers and relentless in supporting young people to improve their outcomes, not least, those who have drug and alcohol problems, who are in the judicial system or those who find retaining education, training or work placements challenging. A high proportion of care leavers progress successfully to higher education, but not enough advantage is yet taken of the opportunities offered through apprenticeships
95. Services for those leaving care are very well resourced and have the wide-ranging expertise and specialist services required to address the diverse needs of care leavers exceptionally well. Care leavers in RBKC have a highly distinctive profile that is well understood by the service. According to the council's current figures, over 50% of the looked after population is over the age of 16, compared to 20% nationally and 30% across London. RBKC has 41 young people looked after, aged 16 to 18, and 126 care leavers aged 19 and over, of whom 82 are 19 to 21 years of age. A distinctive feature of the borough is that 40% of care leavers came to this country as unaccompanied minors. Social workers and personal advisers work closely together to ensure that young people are safe and to prepare them for transfer to IST when they reach the age of 18.
96. Very effective pathway planning successfully meets the needs of care leavers. Plans are initially prepared by social work locality teams at meetings attended by young people's personal advisers as well as their IROs. Plans are appropriately reviewed every six months at meetings chaired by their IRO, until the young person is 18. They ensure that young people's views are listened to and influence the plan. All 18-year-olds who transfer to IST, therefore, have comprehensive pathway plans in place, and these address their needs well. To ensure that a broad perspective on young people's needs is maintained and solutions offered to any barriers, care leaver reviews are chaired alternately by personal advisers and senior social workers.

97. Very careful attention is paid to the views of young people during pathway planning, most particularly on matters of culture and religion. Accommodation, education and preparation for living independently are given very close consideration, as are practical matters such as managing finances and young people's rights. Social workers and personal advisers pay particular attention to young people's emotional well-being when planning for independence, and focus on the effectiveness of any emotional support provided. Pathway plans are always reviewed on time. Most young people contribute to their reviews and appreciate the opportunity provided for discussing their future, clarifying the support that they can expect and the actions that they and personal advisers need to take. Service managers are keen to develop alternatives and even more innovative approaches to pathway planning that will encourage and motivate all young people to engage fully in the process and to take increasing personal responsibility for planning their own future.
98. A significant feature of the excellent care and high-quality services that care leavers receive in RBKC is the time that social workers and personal advisers spend developing ongoing and trusting relationships with young people, and ensuring continuity of support. For example, for one young person who came into care at the age of 17, the social worker is continuing to provide support alongside the personal adviser after the young person reached the age of 18. A clear indication of the trusting relationships established is that the IST is in contact with 98% of care leavers. The home address of only one care leaver is not known to the service, and staff have no concerns over the safety or well-being of this young person, who has always been independent, confident and clear in their intentions. Personal advisers understand the risks and challenges faced by care leavers very well and maintain regular contact by phone and text. They are highly alert to changes in young people's emotional well-being, as well as risks to their safety. They meet young people regularly in their homes, taking time to talk and explore emerging concerns early, should they arise.
99. Care leavers benefit significantly from RBKC staff being supported extremely well in their work. For example, an embedded clinical psychologist advises social workers and personal advisers on how best to work with young people who are particularly vulnerable, assists with complex cases and helps plan interventions. Some 10% of 16- to 18-year-olds are identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation and are provided with additional, well-planned and sensitive support. The adult safeguarding officer similarly works closely with personal advisers on complex cases where there have been safeguarding concerns, for example in helping young people who will require additional support to live safely when they reach the age of 21, but do not meet the eligibility criteria for adult services. Bridging the gap between services for young people and adults by securing appropriate support is a key factor in helping these young people to live independently.

100. Excellent ongoing training and support mean that personal advisers are highly confident in their ability to help young people to live independently and achieve good outcomes. Regular training on topics such as sexual exploitation, radicalisation and adult safeguarding helps personal advisers to reflect upon and improve their practice continuously. Supervision by senior staff provides further valuable opportunity for reflection. For instance, of the six care leavers identified with drug or alcohol concerns, personal advisers have been successful in encouraging five to engage with services offered. In the case of one young person who could not recognise that they had a problem, social workers and personal advisers worked hard, at length and patiently, to secure the young person's cooperation and to engage with the help offered.
101. Tenacious support is provided by social workers and personal advisers who do not give up on young people. The three care leavers who were in custody at the time of this inspection are supported well by their personal advisers, who visit them regularly. Four young people came into care through being on remand at the time of their 18th birthday and thus eligible for leaving care support. Personal advisers work closely with the youth offending team, the probation service, and parents and carers, and arrangements are managed well for accommodating, supporting and ensuring that young people engage in meaningful activities when they are released. For example, a tenancy is being kept open for one young person so that they are not homeless on release. Another challenging young person, with a history of troublesome behaviour, has progressed successfully to higher education through the unstinting support provided.
102. The very high level of support, encouragement and guidance provided by IST is increasingly effective in engaging care leavers in education, employment and training (EET), and improving their outcomes. At the time of the inspection, three-quarters were EET, which is well above the average of 58% nationally. A comparatively high proportion of care leavers – 17% (22 young people) - were in higher education, and they were supported well by personal advisers. By contrast, only one young person was undertaking an apprenticeship. The IST and the virtual school are working with local employers to improve the availability of such opportunities, as well and working with children looked after of secondary school age to raise their awareness and to encourage more to take advantage of apprenticeship opportunities. The 12 care leavers who were young parents at the time of this inspection were coping well with their responsibilities.

103. Prompt access is provided to information, advice and guidance, employability courses and opportunities to young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET. Young people are enabled to improve their skills, motivation and self-esteem through services commissioned from staff-led mutual youth services, and a staff member embedded within IST supports care leavers very well. The service provided is effective in supporting two thirds of those care leavers who are NEET to achieve positive outcomes. Care leavers who came to RBKC as unaccompanied minors benefit significantly from English for speakers of other languages classes provided by the virtual school. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors enjoy the opportunity both to learn and to socialise. The way in which personal advisers differentiated support services to work with young people who have emotional health problems or entrenched involvement with gangs provides a further example of their extremely high level of commitment to care leavers' specific, identified needs.
104. Well-established procedures ensure that accommodation meets the needs of individual care leavers, including the provision of a named person to liaise with RBKC's housing department. As a result, at the time of this inspection, 97% of care leavers were considered to be in suitable accommodation. Very good use is made of the accommodation options available to enable care leavers to live semi-independently with differentiated levels of support. The semi-independent accommodation review panel meets monthly to determine the best option for matching levels of support identified in pathway plans to the accommodation options available. Young people have opportunities to express their views and preferences, supported by foster carers, social workers and personal advisers. Care leavers are prepared very well for living independently, learning to budget, cook and deal with issues such as basic household maintenance. Personal advisers are quick to help young people to resolve problems, should any arise with their accommodation or tenancies, and the housing department is highly sensitive to the particular needs of care leavers.
105. Those not in suitable accommodation were in custody. Securing appropriate accommodation for these three young people on release is a clear priority in their pathway planning. At the time of the inspection, 13 (15%) of 19- to 21-year-olds were continuing to live with their foster carers. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who spoke to inspectors confirmed their preference for living independently as soon as possible, and this is understandable given the circumstances that brought them to this country. There were no young people in bed and breakfast accommodation at the time of inspection, and it is only used as a last resort in emergencies.

106. Health is consistently reviewed in pathway plans, and young people are routinely provided with a chronology and health history on leaving care. The looked after children's nurse routinely carries out health assessments before young people transfer to the IST. Young people are encouraged to access specialist health services. Social workers and personal advisers persevere in encouraging care leavers, who are at first reluctant, to engage with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or services provided by IST's clinical psychologist. These services are increasingly effective in supporting care leavers who have complex emotional health needs.
107. A very high level of commitment to care leavers' and young people's rights is evident. Young people are supported well financially by the borough, including financial support of £6,000 for those progressing to higher education. Young people who spoke to inspectors confirmed that they were aware of the pledge, which is discussed during pathway plan reviews. They felt that their personal advisers were always accessible should any aspect of their rights require clarification.
108. Clearly set-out procedures mean that young people are enabled to make a complaint should they have a concern, and the Advocacy and Participation Service effectively supports young people through the process. The service aims to resolve concerns through discussion, and this helps young people to develop valuable life skills. Examples of concerns requiring recourse to the formal complaints procedure are rare. RBKC maintains a complaints and compliments log to monitor care leavers' views, and young people are provided with a form to complete during pathway plan reviews on their levels of satisfaction.
109. The local authority encourages different settings to celebrate care leavers' successes, and foster carers, social workers and personal advisers pay particular attention to celebrating birthdays and special events. Young people who support the Children in Care Council are recognised and rewarded through trips and activities. The annual Stepping Up Awards is a public demonstration of commitment to young people and the council's pride in their successes, and this helps to develop care leavers' confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p>Summary</p> <p>RBKC’s arrangements for leadership, management and governance are outstanding. The council benefits extensively from the economies of scale and high quality of shared services afforded by its involvement in the tri-borough agreement with both Westminster, and Hammersmith and Fulham councils.</p> <p>Tri-borough arrangements augment existing exemplary management systems within RBKC, under the clear and charismatic leadership of the DFS, who has been pivotal in developing Focus on Practice. A longstanding, stable and talented senior management team provides highly effective leadership and ensures an exceptionally high level of social work practice.</p> <p>Sound governance of services is effectively delivered by the Chief Executive, elected members and statutory partnership boards, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board. All of these link regularly and directly to the tri-borough DCS, who manages this complex arrangement extremely well and ensures effective oversight within a mature culture of appropriate challenge.</p> <p>Highly skilled performance management is a core attribute of the organisation. Clear and consistent management reports exist for all levels of the organisation, and these are widely used to understand comparative performance very well and in depth. A programme of regular and rigorous auditing includes innovative practice weeks when, using case file review and observations, senior managers audit a high number of cases and undertake a thorough analysis of their findings.</p> <p>The comprehensive earning and improvement framework quarterly report collates the findings from a very wide range of management activities to make sure that any learning is integrated and used to drive the continuous development of services. This report supplements detailed oversight of practice maintained by managers, who link directly and often with the front line and know their services exceptionally well.</p> <p>Detailed workforce planning means that RBKC has a stable and loyal workforce. Well-trained and impressive social workers are able to retain their expertise in practice and to pursue career opportunities other than management, including as advanced or specialist social work practitioners and family therapists. The virtuous circle this creates means that RBKC can attract and retain a high-quality workforce.</p> <p>Exceptional added value is delivered by the tri-borough’s talented and able commissioning team, including joint commissioning. Through collaborative commissioning, the team has brokered substantial additional resources to strengthen and expand an already extensive range of services.</p>	

Inspection findings

110. Leadership, management and governance arrangements in RBKC are outstanding. Exceptional tri-borough management arrangements are exemplified by the excellently well-managed Focus on Practice initiative. Funded as part of the government's innovation programme, this highly innovative project aims to enhance social work intervention by adopting a well-thought through and well-resourced model of practice in which RBKC's talented DFS has been pivotal. Innovative elements include a comprehensive and accredited training programme, and skills coaching from trained specialist practitioners. RBKC was already established as an inventive and reflective place to practise social work, and Focus on Practice has effectively harnessed existing attributes and built them into a shared and well-understood way of working. The model has been widely disseminated, and is evidently fully accepted and implemented across the workforce. This was widely in evidence to inspectors during case observation and tracking, when Focus on Practice and its highly positive impact on children was described with enthusiasm by social workers.
111. Very solid governance arrangements are firmly in place, and these ensure that the senior leadership of the tri-borough communicates regularly and effectively. A formal cycle of meetings between the DCS, the DFSs, the LSCB chair, senior leaders such as the boroughs' chief executives and elected members makes sure that they are very well-informed on matters for which they hold strategic responsibility. Senior leaders operate within a culture of respectful challenge and they will, when necessary, hold each other to account. The senior management team, including the DCS, is highly interactive with frontline services and knows individual children and social workers very well. Highly robust lines of communication from frontline social workers to senior leaders enables them to know their services to children thoroughly and extensively.
112. A comprehensive tri-borough learning and improvement framework sets out clear expectations, and ensures that senior managers' thorough oversight is used to drive forward improvements in practice. The learning and improvement framework quarterly report is highly effective in collating findings from serious case reviews, user feedback (including young people, parents, and carers), complaints and compliments, monthly audits and practice weeks. Highly rigorous performance management means that senior leaders in the tri-borough are very aware of the comparative performance of the services that they provide to children.

113. A comprehensive suite of concise and consistent performance reports means that managers and leaders are knowledgeable and well informed about their service's performance against key indicators, and this enables them to understand it very well. Detailed scrutiny and correction of any performance deficits support the delivery of social work of a very high quality, and this means that an ever-greater number of children receive a high-quality service. For example, the RBKC management team identified, as part of its scrutiny of performance reports, an increase in child protection investigations. Management information was scrutinised at case level, performance improvement measures agreed by the management team, then monitored and delivered so that investigations have again decreased, reducing the possibility of children being unnecessarily subjected to child protection procedures.
114. Very strong oversight by managers of practice means that they can be fully assured that it is of a consistently high quality. Scrutiny of case records by inspectors indicates that management supervision is frequent, regular and evident on the child's file. Records generally evidence a very firm focus on the child. This child-centred approach is strongly supported by the work of innovation-funded advanced and specialist practitioners and clinicians. All of these highly skilled and well-trained professionals are embedded within the social work teams as part of Focus on Practice, and they add significant value by ensuring that social workers do not have to buy in specialist services at considerable additional expense.
115. Performance management is significantly enhanced by the use of highly innovative and regular practice weeks, which comprise extensive case audits and practice observations undertaken by senior managers. Full participation by a range of services provides invaluable insight into the actual quality of practice. An extensive overview of the impact of social work intervention on children's lives is obtained. Inquisitive and detailed analysis of the key findings leads to tangible in-borough recommendations to support continuously improved performance. Detailed feedback is provided immediately to social workers. Young people and family members are able to comment on their experiences and the effectiveness of the help and support that they have been offered. Areas for improvement are quickly identified, and change is swiftly and positively affected.
116. Excellent workforce planning by a dedicated tri-borough team means that RBKC has a very stable and experienced workforce, and this enhances consistency and quality of service. Using high-quality performance reports, senior managers are enabled to understand fully the workforce and to ensure that practice standards are rigorously maintained. They describe a 'virtuous circle' in which quality candidates or students aspire to work in the tri-borough. The offer of very low caseloads and career development through training and promotion opportunities attracts, then retains high quality social workers. This skilled and well-trained staff group is then able to deliver the highly innovative and aspirational Focus on Practice outcomes, making RBKC a place where social workers want to work.

117. Staff seen throughout the inspection were passionate, committed, and dedicated to improving children's lives. They are proud to work for and be part of RBKC, and share a collective vision channelled through Focus on Practice. Experienced social workers are enabled to continue in practice and to develop and promote their own and others' social work skills without going into management, by becoming advanced or specialist practitioners, or qualified family therapists. Children benefit directly from the wide range of social work knowledge and expertise that is available to support the help that they receive.
118. A dedicated and talented specialist team operates to a well-established and highly coherent model of commissioning, including joint commissioning. Significant additional resources have been drawn down to support services in a very wide variety of ways, using collaborative commissioning techniques, for instance, the conversion of RBKC's youth services to a staff-led mutual company funded by central government. The demographics of the tri-borough means that commissioners can draw upon trust funds, philanthropic giving and social enterprises to a greater extent than other areas. Tri-borough commissioners are therefore exceptionally skilled at brokering additional resources and using these to add considerable value to existing services. Tri-borough commissioners are also highly active in shaping resources to meet identified need. They have very efficiently decommissioned and recommissioned some services, such as semi-independent living for care leavers.
119. A strong emphasis on resolving dissatisfaction at an early stage means that formal complaints are relatively low in number across the tri-borough. Social workers, activity officers and participation workers build meaningful relationships with children and families, and work hard to resolve any dissatisfaction at an early stage before it escalates into a more formal investigation. Robust advocacy arrangements ensure that children and young people are well supported and helped to articulate their complaints. Complaints literature for children and young people has been reviewed and refreshed to ensure that the complaints process is better promoted and more easily understood. Thorough analysis of complaints and compliments effectively informs the learning and improvement framework, in recognition that learning from complaints is an important element of service development. Individual annual complaints reports for each borough appropriately reflect differing learning outcomes across the tri-borough. Detailed training on effective handling of complaints is successfully delivered to all managers and staff.

120. The consistently high quality of pre-proceedings work across the tri-borough means that social workers attend court having undertaken all necessary assessments to support robust and well-resourced care packages. Rigorous placement finding is very well supported by a comprehensive sufficiency strategy, with clear links to the joint strategic needs assessment prepared by public health. Evidence to support care plans is consistently robust and includes appropriate and thorough consideration of family members. This significantly minimises delay in children looked after achieving the best possible plan for permanence. Positive relationships with Cafcass enable meaningful dialogue and challenge differences. As a result, all issues identified are effectively and quickly resolved. Joint quarterly review of cases of children looked after in proceedings by senior managers gives them the opportunity for challenge and learning to improve services.
121. Very high-quality statements and care plans are presented in court, and they support robust, well-considered decisions when children are in care proceedings. Social workers present their cases confidently, and their evidence is clear and balanced. Timeliness of care proceedings is improving overall, and where it falls outside of 26 week timescales this is in the main due to complex cases and special guardianship orders. Judges report that tri-borough arrangements 'stand out as leading good practice' across London. The tri-borough legal team is described as 'exceptional' and demonstrate a wide range of experience and knowledge that stands up to challenge and supports robust recommendations to court, and this secures the legal position of children looked after.
122. Clear lines of accountability are well evidenced by strong and effective governance arrangements in which the DCS is appropriately the central figure. The DCS manages extremely effectively the complex accountabilities that are inherent in tri-borough arrangements. The DCS works closely with the chief executive and lead member for children's services to ensure the effective delivery of children's services, and they are both well informed and highly engaged. The lead member champions the needs of children and young people and reports that she is acutely aware of the risks that social workers carry. Robust and effective scrutiny arrangements are in place and driven by a comprehensive business plan and work programme, which show that a range of themes are considered in detail and reported on. External consultants are used well to support members in their scrutiny role. Challenging questions on service delivery that hold officers appropriately to account are well evidenced in scrutiny minutes.

123. Effective links have been established across RBKC's key strategic boards. The local authority works effectively with the health and well-being board. The tri-borough JSNA underpins the work of the board and key priorities such as childhood obesity, young people's mental health and child poverty inform the health and well-being work programme for 2015–16. The work of the LSCB is widely understood through the presentation of the LSCB annual report at key strategic meetings, including both the health and well-being board and the scrutiny committee.
124. Strong collaboration between the 'Prevent' team and children's social care services means that any young person referred to 'Prevent' is passed to social workers, and similarly referrals to 'Prevent' are regularly made by a range of children's teams and schools. The channel process enhances joint working between services to children, schools and the 'Prevent' team. This ensures a youngperson-focused and proportionate response to any referral. Proactive, collaborative practice results in early detection and prevention of radicalisation.
125. RBKC is an active, strong and committed corporate parent. The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the lead member for children's services and supported in its work by the service improvement group. Workstreams are appropriately linked to the six objectives set out in the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Tri-Borough Strategy 2014–2017. Children and young people are consulted and are active participants in corporate parenting arrangements. Recent work has been undertaken on how children are supported in education, including those living and educated out of borough. Learning has been drawn out and actions from the consultation have now been established, including developing a group to track EETs and NEETs, and to look at better employment opportunities for care leavers, including apprenticeships.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

LSCB arrangements are good because the tri-borough achieves the right balance between shared and local functions, and this ensures that children are effectively safeguarded. Overall, amalgamation under a single LSCB creates significant benefits for young people and for all partner agencies. These include rationalisation of time, the secure involvement of senior representatives from partner agencies, many of which span several boroughs, pooling resources to tackle issues in common, and alignment with tri-borough children's services.

Robust links are in place between the LSCB and other statutory bodies, and this allows the board to make sure that children's safeguarding stays high on everyone's agenda.

Extensive engagement by partner agencies has been secured and the work of the board is therefore well resourced through partners' financial contributions. The board's business support team would benefit from a work plan to sit alongside the board's business plan and drive through its priorities for children.

Through systematic analysis of audits under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, the LSCB has assured itself that safeguarding is a priority for all partner agencies. The board's quality assurance sub-group effectively monitors multi-agency safeguarding performance across the tri-borough. Detailed analysis of data is routinely undertaken by the sub-group and reported to the board by exception, although the board would benefit from a review of this process to assure itself of its effectiveness. Actions arising from reviewing data lie with individual partner agencies, and no system is in place to monitor whether actions identified are carried through.

Rigorous multi-agency themed audits have been systematically undertaken by the board. These audits provide appropriate recommendations for change, but further checks have not taken place to establish whether practice has actually changed or improved.

Effective monitoring by the child sexual exploitation and missing sub-group enables the board to have a robust understanding of missing children and their behaviour across the tri-borough.

An established case review sub-committee ensures that lessons learnt from reviews are disseminated promptly across the tri-borough. The sub-committee has clear action plans in place for each individual case review but does not have an overall

action plan to cover its ongoing work.

A clear and detailed learning and improvement framework incorporates the learning from SCRs, themed audits and performance monitoring by the board. The learning and development sub-group of the LSCB undertakes its role across the tri-borough and ensures that sufficient safeguarding training is provided across all partner agencies. However, no formal analysis of the impact of training takes place either across the tri-borough or at borough level.

A wide range of activity to tackle the board's priorities and any lessons from SCRs is appropriately included in the LSCB annual report. An attendance log shows that some members have infrequent attendance, but no challenge is evident. A comprehensive safeguarding plan covers all of the board's priorities.

RBKC's partnership board effectively addresses local safeguarding issues. It works to a comprehensive action plan that is suitably aligned to the priorities of the tri-borough LSCB.

Recommendations

- Review the extensive dataset to ensure that it is aligned to the Board's priorities.
- Devise a system for ensuring that actions arising from data scrutiny are carried out in the individual boroughs.
- Ensure that recommendations from multi-agency themed audits are carried out, and analyse their impact, if any, on improving practice.
- Develop an overarching SCR action plan to track the progress of work arising from individual case reviews.
- Devise a system to escalate concerns about infrequent partnership attendance at the board.

Inspection findings

126. LSCB arrangements are effectively shared, and almost all of the statutory functions of the LSCB and its sub-groups are delivered across the tri-borough. Each borough appropriately maintains a local LSCB partnership group, and this ensures that local safeguarding issues are suitably considered and reported to the LSCB.

127. Governance arrangements between the LSCB, other key strategic bodies, elected members and chief executive officers in each of the respective bodies have been effectively developed by the board and are clearly documented. The independent chair links frequently with the DCS for the tri-borough, while remaining appropriately independent. Key LSCB representatives, such as the DCS, are able to ensure that safeguarding children issues are considered across strategic boards, and that elected members are engaged in the local LSCB partnership groups. The independent chair meets with the chief executives of each borough at least annually, and with the chief executive for RBKC twice yearly. However, this minimal involvement does not provide them with a sufficiently detailed oversight of safeguarding within boroughs. The independent chair operates across the tri-borough, and this limits the time available for maintaining links with key elected members and strategic partnership groups, such as the health and well-being boards.
128. The independent chair of the LSCB, who is long established in the role, actively promotes safeguarding issues across the partnership and community, and provides appropriate challenge. As a result, extensive engagement by partners has been secured across the full range of safeguarding work. Partners are encouraged and enabled by the chair to raise issues and challenges constructively. This is well evidenced in the minutes of the board and its sub-groups.
129. The operational work of the board is well supported. Each of the key partners appropriately provides financial contributions, and these fund the business support team for the board. The team is actively involved in enabling community and service user involvement in the board's work. The board was able to demonstrate the involvement of young people in developing publicity material, but acknowledges that the engagement of young people in helping to develop its work could be further enhanced. Over the past year, there have been several changes in the business manager post holder, and recently a new manager has been seconded to the post. While this has not negatively impacted on the support provided to the board, a business plan to coordinate the activities of the business support team and the work arising from LSCB and its sub-groups is not evidently in place.
130. The LSCB has effectively ensured that safeguarding is a priority for all partner agencies. A biannual cycle of audits under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 is currently being renewed. The board has developed and piloted a bespoke, online self-assessment tool that is currently going live. Previous returns have been systematically analysed and reported to the board. Schools in particular are actively engaged and represented in the work of the board, as are the full range of health partners, police and representative voluntary sector organisations.

131. The quality assurance group of the LSCB oversees partners' multi-agency safeguarding performance across the tri-borough. It draws upon both qualitative and quantitative data, and is supported well by the tri-borough performance team in compiling data into a detailed, high-quality performance report. Partner agencies now contribute to the dataset, which was initially extensively based on local authority children's services data. However, the LSCB has not systematically reviewed this extensive dataset to ensure that this is refined, aligned to its priorities and manageable (Recommendation).
132. The dataset reported upon sufficiently enables the LSCB to interrogate its key safeguarding functions. Detailed analysis of the data is routinely undertaken by the sub-group and reported to the board, drawing out themes and trends. Partners provide commentary on the data supplied to clarify and add context to it. The group's report to the LSCB is by exception, identifying issues that the board may want to interrogate further. Responsibility for actions arising from the scrutiny of data lies with individual agencies, but no system is in place to monitor whether actions identified are carried through (Recommendation).
133. A varied programme of multi-agency themed audits has been systematically undertaken by partners on behalf of the board. These are appropriately selected in response to key issues arising from quality assurance, data analysis or to inform short-life working groups. These facilitate learning and identify key areas for improvement in services. For example, a focused audit of young people at risk of sexual exploitation identified effective practice by involving systemic family therapists. While the multi-agency audits provide recommendations for change, further auditing of the themed issues has not been undertaken to enable the LSCB to know whether practice has actually changed or improved as a result (Recommendation).
134. The child sexual exploitation and missing sub-group of the LSCB effectively monitors information on children who go missing, and this enables the board to have a robust understanding of missing children and their behaviour across the tri-borough. The missing person coordinator provides weekly information on missing children, and ensures that this information is updated by operational workers. The coordinator maintains lists of both the top 10 missing young people across the Borough, and the top 10 within each borough. This information is suitably analysed through a quarterly meeting, where reductions or escalations in missing episodes are discussed. Through this close analysis and weekly monitoring, the sub-group is aware that only a small number of young people are involved in the majority of missing episodes. This enables those young people to be closely monitored and targeted work to be undertaken with them to minimise risk. Through careful monitoring, the LSCB has a clear picture of the profile of child sexual exploitation and offending across the boroughs. Data mapping has helped to build a picture of hotspots. All this information, as well as information on new cases, is fed into the MASE and the LSCB. This ensures that the LSCB has a clear understanding of child sexual exploitation: its profile, offenders, victims, and the quality and effectiveness of services as well as the hotspots and places of concern.

135. An established case review sub-committee across the tri-borough has a balanced representation from all agencies, including representation of voluntary services and the police. It has appropriately recommended timely commissioning of SCRs to the LSCB, and these have been conducted with a suitable focus on the lived experience of the child. The majority of reviews undertaken in recent years were completed within realistic timescales, and when there have been delays due to external constraints, for instance criminal proceedings, the sub-committee ensures that emerging lessons learnt are shared prior to completion in order to improve practice swiftly.
136. The LSCB ensures that lessons from reviews are shared as well as outcomes, and that these are disseminated promptly across the tri-borough, regardless of their borough of origin. A detailed and succinct summary of lessons learnt is circulated on a quarterly basis to all agencies and staff in order to promote awareness, with a representative of each agency tasked to ensure its distribution. Participation on the case review sub-committee of the learning and development business manager helps to ensure that priority is given to training needs identified as a result of SCRs, and that adjustments to training materials are made and cascaded to all multi-agency partners. The lead designated officer for the tri-borough uses her extensive networks with other boroughs well, so that statutory safeguarding training reflects up-to-date practice.
137. Significant cases that do not reach the thresholds for, or are outside of, the scope of an SCR are still reviewed, with a number of significant lessons learnt. The board carefully reviews the criteria for SCRs and where necessary will commission one even when formal thresholds are not met, and when it is considered that lessons can be learnt. The impact of SCRs is evaluated through case file auditing to check for the positive application of lessons learnt.
138. Challenges identified by the SCR sub-committee align well with those faced by frontline workers, including tools to identify and assess early neglect, the quality of intervention in cases of domestic violence, and issues around the mobility of abusive families. A wide range of methods is used to highlight and follow up identified themes and issues with all partners, including a useful website, additional community work and regular meetings with school improvement advisers. The sub-committee has good, close relationships with the three partnership boards to share themes and provide advice to improve practice. The sub-committee has clear action plans in place for each individual case review, but does not have an overall action plan to cover its ongoing work (Recommendation).

139. The child death overview panel (CDOP) effectively undertakes its statutory duties across the tri-borough. It is well attended and chaired. Members are well informed and demonstrate a clear understanding of trends in local child deaths, and the reasons for these. The number of incidents across the tri-borough is relatively low, with 23 reviews last year. As a result, there is no disaggregation of data by borough, although work is commencing with other CDOPs across North West London in order to gain a fuller picture. Research undertaken into sudden, unexplained death led to training for professionals, and awareness raising around issues such as co-sleeping. A clear understanding of issues relevant to the area, such as deaths in private hospitals, abroad and of older children, has led to further work, such as that around vulnerabilities linked to death by stabbing, in order to drill down and identify the issues, and has helped to prevent further deaths. Social Care Institute of Excellence methodology has been used to undertake learning reviews in some cases, with lessons appropriately disseminated, and this appears to be having a positive impact on practice.
140. The CDOP produces an annual report, and this is suitably considered by the LSCB. The most recent report's main theme was related to peri/neonatal incidents, and life-threatening illnesses. A review of the neonatal deaths was undertaken, and concluded that good care was provided. The report appropriately provides a breakdown by age and ethnicity, and some analysis of the issues.
141. A clear and detailed learning and improvement framework has been developed, implemented and recently reviewed by the LSCB. This has incorporated the learning from SCRs, themed audits and performance monitoring by the board. The development sub-group of the LSCB across the tri-borough ensures that sufficient mandatory safeguarding training is provided across all partners, both on a multi-agency basis and within individual partners' training programmes. All key voluntary and statutory partners are represented on the sub-group, and they are actively engaged in delivering as well as developing training. The group has maintained core safeguarding training, while developing or updating training modules in response to current, high-profile safeguarding issues. For example, a practice sharing conference on 'Prevent' for schools has been developed, and is being followed up by similar events on child sexual exploitation and neglect. The training has led to increased referrals from schools, and early years settings are also contacting 'Prevent' teams for training. Partners, particularly from the voluntary sector, receive regular information and access to safeguarding training.

142. Members of the learning and development sub-group are fully aware of the need to develop further its work and continually raise awareness of the LSCB. The sub-group has identified the need to undertake more systematic evaluation of the impact of the extensive safeguarding training provided through the LCSB. Currently, the sub-group primarily bases its evaluation of training on self-reporting attendee questionnaires immediately following training sessions. Plans to develop this will require attendees to complete questionnaires three months after the training to evaluate what difference the training has made, but these are at an early stage. At the time of this review, there was too great a reliance on anecdotal information with no formal analysis of the impact of training either across the tri-borough or at borough level.
143. Most training continues to be provided during the day in traditional classroom or conference type environments. For some partners, releasing staff to attend such training is a challenge. The sub-group has developed some more flexible sessions, for instance to enable police officers to attend. However, the provision of a wide range of elearning modules, to improve access to training, has been delayed by internal technology challenges.
144. The LSCB has ensured that the needs of key vulnerable groups of young people are systematically reported to, and considered by the board. It has been proactive in supporting and developing a number of safeguarding services. For example, the LSCB has supported a pilot project to tackle female genital mutilation, an identified gap in services. As a result, 68 women have been supported in the last year through early help, and others through child in need or child protection plans. The board has been instrumental in the development of the harmful practices project, which also reports to the existing violence against women group. This tri-borough project tackles harmful practices such as forced marriage, honour-related violence and faith-based abuse.
145. The highly effective neglect sub-group was formed as a short-life, working group following analysis of the high prevalence of neglect as a category for child protection plans. The multi-agency group extensively reviewed research, SCRs and direct work tools. They then completed a case file audit and established the most effective method of working with families to fit with existing structures, working practices and local need. A further aim of the group is to raise awareness among practitioners. The toolkit subsequently developed highlights the lived experience of the neglected child and is currently being trialled for effectiveness by early-help practitioners and social workers. Early indicators have shown that it creates a focus on the child rather than the family, and that parents have embraced this way of working. An awareness raising conference is currently being planned for May 2016 in partnership with the NSPCC. This will form the start of a campaign that aims to ensure that awareness of neglect reaches all services within the voluntary and statutory sectors. Effectiveness will be measured through various means such as a re-audit of case files, increased consultation on neglect issues both within partner organisations and within social care, and a reduction in the longer term of children on a child protection plan under neglect.

146. The LSCB Annual Report describes a wide range of activity that has taken place to tackle the board's priorities, and lessons from SCRs are appropriately included. However, the report does not provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of safeguarding across the tri-borough. Each priority has a 'what difference has it made' section, although the section is more process or action based, rather than evidencing outcomes for children. The report attempts to understand the population across the tri-borough and the differences between them, although there is little analysis of this. No safeguarding data is presented in the report, and it does not detail any challenges or demonstrate the impact of these. An attendance log shows that some members have infrequent attendance, but there is no challenge to this outlined in the report (Recommendation).
147. A comprehensive LSCB safeguarding plan suitably covers all of the board's priorities. All actions have a lead organisation or sub-group attached, although there are no timescales for completion of those actions. The description of the evidence of impact is, in places, more outcome focused than the business plan. This could be further improved.
148. A wide-ranging membership, with good attendance, means that the RBKC partnership group effectively identifies local concerns, discusses local issues, shares information and identifies organisational changes that may affect partnership working. Networking and information sharing are valued and effective functions of the group. The differences that the partnership group makes to children and families in RBKC are numerous. For example, a toolkit and campaign on neglect, focusing on frontline staff, ensures that workers are more attuned to identify children and young people who could be at risk of neglect. Private fostering has also been highlighted throughout partner agencies.
149. The chairs of each partnership board meet regularly to share information and are using the boroughs well to trial potential new ways of working, for instance the introduction of questionnaires to assess the impact of training on practice.
150. A comprehensive action plan sets the scope and focus for the partnership board, enabling actions and impact to be monitored and tracked. These reflect LSCB priorities, although having a focus at the local level. Actions arising from the partnership meetings are carried forward to ensure completion. Agencies challenge each other and this supports learning and removes barriers to effective safeguarding. For example, the voluntary sector challenged the management of historical allegations and referrals to the boroughs. A challenge log is maintained to track any issues that have arisen. The partnership board recognises that an area for development is bringing the voice of the child into its information-sharing and decision-making processes.

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 includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

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

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

The review of the LSCB 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 LSCB under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

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