WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES IN WANDSWORTH

April 2018

Each section of this report addresses the following questions:

• What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your Local Authority?

• How do you know it?

• What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
1. Overview

1.1. The Department is very different to the one inspected in 2015. It has a clear vision, developed with staff and partners, which puts the child and their family including carers at the heart of all we do, with an unrelenting focus on empowering the children and their families/carers to make the changes necessary to improve their lives. The vision sets out a clear focus on prevention, early intervention and ensuring high levels of aspiration for all young people.

1.2. The initial phase of the Council’s improvement journey in 2016 focused on ensuring compliance and basic practice improvement through the introduction of Practice Standards, the ‘Top Ten Non-Negotiables’ and training on the application of thresholds to ensure consistent risk management. Management oversight was strengthened through supervision training, creating new posts of Assistant Team Manager, the appointment of extra managers and improved quality assurance. The front door was remodelled to support timely and accurate decision making.

1.3. To sustain the improvements in practice, and to address the increased volume of casework (e.g. referrals up 31% from May 2016 to May 2017, Section 47s up 25% and 37% more children coming into care), two additional temporary teams were created (CiN Peripatetic and a third Children Looked After team).

1.4. To implement the vision, a new operating model was developed which includes a refocussed Early Help service. The new model addressed the previous separation of Youth Support Teams by bringing all Children Looked After and Children in Need work together under two dedicated Heads of Service. This has reduced the number of handovers between services whilst maintaining a specialist adolescent focus in the two new teams. New services and methods of working have been established including an Edge of Care Team, Family Group Conferencing and a dedicated CSE/Missing service. The existing Signs of Safety practice framework has been further embedded in practice supported by the work of the new Social Care Academy.

1.5. A key element of the improvement journey has been to secure the necessary staff and management capacity to ensure children are safe. A workforce strategy has been implemented, driven by the Director of Children’s Services, supported by a new, dedicated HR resource. A priority has been to decrease reliance on agency staff. Vacancy rates for social workers have fallen from 32% to 28% currently and the proportion of agency workers has shown a corresponding fall. Sixty-seven new permanent appointments were made in 2017/18 compared to 28 in 2016/17, including new senior managers for CLA and CiN. The workforce strategy is currently being refreshed to market Wandsworth’s strong training and development offer and to promote the wide range of resources available for social workers as the desired consistency of practice is being still being impacted by staff turnover. To address this, Frontline and Step Up programmes are underway, strong interims are being encouraged to take up permanent roles (31 to date), innovations such as the use of a £3,000 retention bonus are in place and the LA will be recruiting extra newly qualified staff, over establishment as part of the drive to “grow our own”.


1.6. Commissioning plans underpinned by a detailed Sufficiency Strategy are being rolled out. A key priority is to create local resources to reduce dependency on residential care and dependency on independent fostering providers, especially those out of area. Recruitment of additional in-house foster carers is underway supported by extra assessment capacity from Coram. This has resulted in a doubling of enquiries and 12 new carers approved in 2017/18 compared to just 3 in 2016/17. The Council is also increasing in-borough placement choice for looked after children and care leavers through innovative partnership work with Housing and Property Services to maximise the use of council assets. As a result, a new children’s home (Luminous House) will open in Wandsworth in July and a new house for care leavers, a crash pad and a training flat opened in 2017. All these properties were co-designed with young people. In 2018/19 a property for 16-18 years old will open and options for two further properties are being progressed with the support of the Housing Department. Quality assurance of providers has been strengthened with an improvement notice being served on one provider of semi-independent care.

1.7. The Care Leaving service was brought back in house in September 2017 due to the unsatisfactory pace of improvements by Catch 22. This service has significantly improved in the 7 months it has been in-house. The Independent Visitors service was also brought in house in 2017/18 resulting in an increase of Independent Visitors from 8 to 33 and increased support for Children Looked After. The Return Home Interview service run by Barnardo’s came in house from 1st April.

1.8. Reflecting the feedback from DfE reviews and the first four monitoring visits by Ofsted, the improvement plan was refreshed in April 2017 to achieve a greater focus on working with partners and embedding an effective early help offer. Progress in this area was recognised in the March 2018 monitoring visit. The updated plan contains actions to further strengthen management oversight of high risk vulnerable young people and improve the take-up of Return Home Interviews.

1.9. At the heart of all these changes has been a strengthening of leadership, both strategically and operationally. Elected Members have shown their commitment through the allocation of £14m additional resources. They have also reviewed and strengthened their scrutiny arrangements resulting in an effective, well attended Corporate Parenting Panel. As a result of these changes, Members can identify how their knowledge of services has increased and the impact of their work. Senior leaders have driven innovation and improved practice. They have a much better line of sight to the front door, for example, through performance information and scrutiny of high risk cases. They are more visible and engaged with the workforce and this has been confirmed in the annual SW health Check. Operational managers have better oversight, understanding of performance and challenge. The service knows itself better and recognises that it’s continuing greatest challenge is to secure consistent practice and ensure that weaknesses in case recording, the quality of assessments and plans, analysis of ethnicity, reflective supervision and capturing the voice of the child. Further work to address these is set out in the following sections, all aimed at improving children’ lived experience.
2. Children in Need of Help and Protection

2.1. Front Door Services

2.1.1. The front door services are now very different from 2015. Learning from other authorities and audit findings, they have been restructured to establish an Initial Point of Contact (IPOC) and a refreshed role for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with routes into the Referral and Assessment Service (RAS) and Early Help. With more effective management of processes and thresholds at the front door it is now more efficient for IPOC to triage and for MASH to focus on those contacts which will benefit from the multi-agency discussion. This ensures that the service continues to identify risk appropriately. Children and families are then offered appropriate support based on their identified needs, either through early help services or statutory interventions, in a timely manner.

2.1.2. The service is now identifying risk much better. Ofsted monitoring reports and independent audits have recognised that thresholds are being applied correctly. Signs of Safety mapping is used on each contact to identify strengths and weaknesses and analyse risk. Reference is made to the threshold guidance where necessary. Re-referrals are relatively high; a previous analysis showed few identifiable trends but a further analysis has recently been completed to understand the causal factors and check on the application of thresholds. One theme previously identified was domestic abuse, which led to the setting up of a domestic abuse steering group, a strategy and alerts for schools via ‘Tearose’.

2.1.3. The enhanced offer of early help is expected to impact positively on re-referrals in the coming months, as more children and families will be receiving early intervention support to divert them from needing statutory service. The changes are already impacting through increased numbers of families coming through the early help pathway. At the end of Q3, 604 children and their families had been supported through this route. The service has strengthened the early help family support offer for children and families through the new ‘THRIVE Together’ team who have supported 235 children and 140 adults within 110 families. Outcomes include improved school engagement and participation including attendance, punctuality, readiness for learning, re-connecting families to the school community and helping them engage positively in the life of the school; positive parenting, positive community and neighbourhood engagement including building a positive community network, participating in faith groups, building constructive relationships with neighbours, reduced parental conflict, improved routines and boundaries that support the child to feel safe, nurtured, cared for particularly where parents are separated. As at Q3, the service is keeping in touch with 83 children and families, including ones initially reluctant to engage.

2.1.4. Confidence in decision making has been strengthened through improved management oversight and better information sharing. A manager makes the final decision on every contact to children’s services; this provides additional
support to social workers and allows for a more consistent approach to threshold application and scrutiny. Partners are co-located at the front door and engaged in daily MASH meetings and strategy discussions, with police engagement in strategy discussions is now at 98%. Further work with partners, notably health, is under way to ensure they contribute to strategy discussions through conference calls, using a new approach with two timeslots per day for partners to call in.

2.1.5. The service is providing a timelier response for children and their families. This has resulted in 99.8% of referrals being completed within 24 hours in March 2018, an increase on 65.5% in March 2017. Children are being visited promptly when serious child protection concerns are raised (Section 47s) this includes the IPOC team supporting the assessment teams to complete S47 visits late in the working day as a result, 88% of children were seen within 24 hours in March 2018 an increase from 70% in March 2017. Assessment visits within 3 days of referral has been too low but is now improving with 70% achieved in March – and the service is working with the performance team to ensure data makes clear where the social worker has visited or attempted to visit, not just where the child is seen. Managers are challenged on performance on a weekly basis by the Assistant Director and this has led to a further increase to 91% in early April.

2.1.6. Considerable work to improve the response to CSE and missing children has been undertaken. Relationships between services have been strengthened with the new CSE/Missing team working closely with front door services, including a recent addition of Missing Business Support Officer who will be co-located for half the week with IPOC. Multi-agency meetings now take place on a weekly basis to ensure managers have a ‘live’ update of missing young people and risks and can chase practice and follow up action in real time. RHI performance has fluctuated but is improving, with 89% offered to missing CLA in March 2018. While 74% of the RHIs offered were accepted (a large improvement from less than 50% in the summer of 2017), this is still too low so two new missing workers have been appointed and the Barnardo’s posts were brought in-house from April.

2.1.7. To support the front door teams, an edge of care team has been established. This is beginning to show impact with evidence of successful approaches with 5 young people remaining at home, 2 of whom had presented as homeless, 2 at risk of family breakdown and 1 able to return home after being accommodated briefly. Recording of the team’s involvement is being strengthened to evidence impact.

2.1.8. Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are now being promoted across services, with a specific focus in the hospital team since October 2017. It is, however, very early days with scope to expand considerably – only four FGCs have taken place to date, two of which provided family plans that were used in the court process.

2.1.9. The quality of assessments has improved and work is on-going to ensure this is consistent and to improve timeliness further. Audits have provided positive feedback on identification of risks factors and oversight of family situation; however, some assessments have lacked detailed exploration of impact of
ethnicity and diversity on children or had too narrow a focus on the presenting issue. Risk assessments are recorded in a several places on case records so work is in hand to create a risk summary that is easily accessible on the child’s file.

2.1.10. The quality of chronologies continues to be inconsistent and work to update them is being followed up by managers. Training has been commissioned to help staff improve. Chronologies are one element of the refreshed transfer checklist, implemented from March 2018, which provides a prompt to managers to challenge lack of chronologies at the time of transfer from assessment teams. Genogram training took place in February to highlight their use as a tool for the identification of family networks and patterns within these relationships.

2.1.11. Children’s views and feelings are being gathered but managers and social workers are aware of the need to improve recording of this to ensure it is clearly evidenced within their case files. Analysis of themes emerging from children’s views is an area that requires further development and is a target for training.

2.1.12. Transfers of cases between services continues to be a challenge. A new protocol has been implemented and events have been held to work on the culture and cross-service working relationships. Improvements of transfers between services, have been reported by managers in the last two weeks (March 2018).

2.1.13. Supervision performance has improved considerably in the front door teams with three teams at 95%-100% in March 2018 and the fourth at 91%. Staff now report much more positively on supervision. However, audits still show inconsistency in the quality of supervision, which has been impacted by staff turnover. A mandatory training session was held for all RAS managers in March 2018, in addition to the induction provided earlier for the new managers.

2.1.14. Early permanency has an increased focus from the front door onwards, for example parallel planning and holding permanency planning meetings. Impact is beginning to show: 4 FGCs at front door, and an increase in foster-to-adopt referrals from hospital team with one very successful placement likely to lead to adoption. Public Law Outline tracking meetings, have identified process and practice issues, which have been formulated in to actions to be addressed.

2.1.15. Performance issues have at times been related to staff challenges – both vacancies and turnover and poor practice by some locum workers. Risks have been mitigated through strengthened management oversight (e.g. on all referral decisions not made within 24 hours) and ongoing recruitment drives for permanent staff. Although average caseloads are now appropriate across services, there are still a small number of individual high caseloads (over 30) in the assessment teams. This is partly due to the need to close some cases and to allow more time for individual teams to complete their assessment work when on duty, the service has been restructured into four teams to support a four-week duty cycle. Enhancing the early help offer is also having a good impact.
2.1.16. The department is creating a ‘grow your own’ culture where staff are supported to progress, for example a secondment of an experienced social worker to an assistant team manager post. The department’s training offer continues to expand and is related to priority areas for improvement, for example, recent sessions on permanency planning and genograms and plans for a supervision refresh for managers. All the managers in the Referral and Assessment Service (RAS) have an experienced manager as a mentor, who they meet with monthly. There is an on-going focus on recruiting high quality social workers, including specialist workers. The Private Fostering role is one which is currently covered by an agency worker. Plans are in place to recruit to this post and strengthen the management as it is recognised that this is an area for improvement.

2.1.17. Quality assurance and performance management has been strengthened with learning applied to improve the front door arrangements, including Child Protection Coordinators providing consultation on thresholds at the front door. As a result, there has been a steady reduction in the number of children subject to Child Protection (CP) plans from 415 in June 2017 to 288 at March 2018. Conversion rates from ICPC to CPP have remained largely over 90%, which shows thresholds are being appropriately applied and suggests this improved joint working with the Children’s Planning and Review team is having positive impact.

2.1.18. A high-level Business Process review has helped identify the child’s journey from early help onwards and supported a shared understanding across the service of this and the interface between teams. Front Door Services are working better with partners strategically and operationally and have received positive feedback from schools, GPs and the NHS who feel they are better involved in decisions e.g. reviewing GP information request forms. Communication has improved with regular meetings between front door managers and partners, as well as training sessions and observation visits to the front door. There has been a significant shift towards a more collaborative culture and effective working practice.

2.1.19. The Council has invested in and prioritised a range of early help provision to give children a good start, for example, utilising the CAMHS Transformation Funding to develop collaborative approaches with GPs to deliver support for new parents with mental health issues and re-commissioning a more community led Health Visiting Service. As a result, services are reaching more vulnerable children aged 0-5 evidenced through increased take up of early learning by disadvantaged 2 year olds and vulnerable 3 and 4 year olds access to early learning and swift access for children to Speech and Language Therapy. This has translated into improved outcomes for children at the Early Years Foundation Stage including those who are disadvantaged. In 2017 75% of children achieved a good level of development (71% nationally); the disadvantaged gap was 3% less than national.

2.1.20. The service is also placing emphasis on early intervention for primary children including piloting Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) which is live in 12 primary schools and working with the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to increase the effectiveness of early help in preventing youth violence.
2.1.21. Wandsworth continues to deliver the Troubled Families programme. A DfE evaluation report highlighted that as of December 2017, Wandsworth had 1,738 families on the programme towards a target of 2,190 by 2020. Of these, 720 had achieved significant and sustained progress, and 104 were in continuous employment by March 2018, resulting in 824 total Payment by results claims. There were 42 local authorities, including Wandsworth, that started Phase 2 of the Troubled Families. At 9th March 2018, 38% of families in Wandsworth had achieved “significant and sustained progress”. The corresponding figure for all local authorities that started Phase 2 in 2014 was 28% and the national average is 22%. Wandsworth is ranked 21st out of 141 local authorities. End of year data published after the DfE report highlights that by the end of March 2018 2,177 families have been supported via the programme in Wandsworth.

2.1.22. Overall there is more consistency in the quality of early help assessments (EHA) and increased use of this by partners. Areas that are priorities for improvement include child view, parent view, action plans, safety goals, team around the child/family, as these are below 70% performance in quarterly dip sampling. To aid this, the Council is renewing its early help practice support offer and in the summer term early help practice groups will be going live in key primary schools. Not all services are using EHAs; youth services and children’s centres are being targeted therefore to increase the use of EHA to meet the needs of families.

2.2. Children in Need Service (CiN)

2.2.1. The CiN service works with children on CiN plans, child protection plans, looked after children and children in care proceedings or and private law proceedings. The nine CiN teams comprise of six locality 0-18 teams, one Adolescent team, the Peripatetic team and the Frontline unit. The service has seen a large increase in volumes from 825 children with allocated workers in February 2017 to 1,025 in October 2017. The Council responded to this increase by allocating additional capacity to the service. This has helped with caseloads to an average of 20-22 but the number of agency staff has impacted on consistency of practice. The CiN teams are moving to the 3rd floor of the Town Hall Extension to strengthen working together with the RAS/safeguarding teams for a ‘one service’ approach.

2.2.2. The addition of the Peripatetic Team has been a success and has eased caseloads in the wider service. Without these extra resources, the average caseload per social worker would be 23 children compared to the current average of 16. The team has been piloting the CIN trajectory planning for children in need (West Sussex) model to make sure work is focussed, timely and reviewed to have a positive impact on children and families. Between August 2017 and March 2018, the team ended social work engagement with 27 families involving 62 children.
2.2.3. The CiN service has good working relationships with the Council’s legal team and positive feedback from the courts. At February 2018, there were 43 sets of care proceedings in progress, with 35 (81%) predicted to conclude within 26 weeks.

2.2.4. Twenty-five children and young people in care known to the CiN service have returned home in the last 6 months, the majority to their parent(s) or a family member as the result of thorough assessments completed in care proceedings. There are currently 22 children accommodated under S20 in the CiN service; if rehabilitation home does not work proceedings will be issued. The edge of care team is currently involved with 3 of 4 adolescents looked after under S20 in CiN.

2.2.5. Improved joint working service-wide, including between the CiN service and Safeguarding Standards, has supported the reduction in the number of children on child protection plans from 415 in June 2017 to 288 at March 2018. Work continues to reduce this further as the rate is higher than statistical neighbours.

2.2.6. The service has strengthened the quality of assessments and planning. Audits have shown that assessments are child focused, with children and families sighted on the worries. However, audits have also shown that equality and diversity need to be explored in more depth including the impact these have on the family. Case improvement plans following audit are in place but are not yet robust enough. This is being addressed through staff briefings and a requirement that the plans are reviewed at supervision; it is too early to see the full impact. Updated assessments for child protection conference and CLA reviews are not always completed in a timely fashion and shared with parents and children five days before. Managers are working with Safeguarding Standards to improve this.

2.2.7. Consistency of practice is an area for further improvement. CiN managers are working closely with their teams to make sure practice is consistent and child focussed, that direct work is routinely added to children’s files and that staff are using the correct templates and Mosaic workflow. There have been instances of families being referred again because they have not had a step-down plan to other services when social work service has ended. For some children, there has been a lack of thorough chronologies, genograms and summaries. The service is implementing the wider use of a recording template and is insisting on weekly recording days within teams to improve this.

2.2.8. The timeliness of Child Protection visits fluctuates around 90% on average across the CiN teams, for example, 92% in March 2018 compared to 89% a year earlier. All missed CP visits are reported weekly to the Assistant Director for Children and Families and followed up by the service managers. To help social workers record their visits in a timely manner, managers have developed a form to streamline recording. In addition, the service is exploring ways to record management oversight of visit exceptions if justified (e.g. when family is abroad) to ensure that weekly data helps managers understand different timescales for visiting.
2.2.9. There is now an emphasis from the CiN management team on checking that the child’s voice in updated assessments and in evidencing the work social workers are doing with children by providing examples at child protection conferences and CLA reviews and recording the work on Mosaic. Social workers are sharing tools and ways of working in team professional development and within CiN service. Performance data and audit is showing that most children subject to S47 enquiries are being seen within one day of the referral, and children with an allocated SW are being seen alone or with siblings to establish their wishes and feelings. The service will be introducing a staff profile pro-forma in June for social workers to share when meeting children for first time to provide information on the worker and open discussion on child’s own interests to lead into direct work.

2.2.10. There continues to be a strong emphasis on safeguarding, risk analysis and safety planning for young people at risk of CSE, gangs and Child Exploitation within the service, including engagement in multi-agency meetings such as SEMAP and Gangs-MAP. The service has a Consultant Social Worker who specialises in CSE and supports practitioners, as well as having strong links with the CSE/Missing team. Management oversight and grip has been strengthened on young people missing with an emphasis on ensuring risk assessment and safety planning is undertaken through strategy meetings, multi–agency work with police, schools and health, timely RHIs and analysis of these in supervision. The Deputy Service Manager attends multi-agency missing meeting giving management oversight of current missing young people and scrutiny of practice in relation to missing.

2.2.11. Early permanency is a key focus. The CIN service is involved in work with Coram to embed permanency planning from the front door onwards. This has included permanency training, and team managers have taken responsibility for chairing all Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs). The training has led to an increase in PPMs and early parallel planning for children. A recent audit of the impact of Independent Reviewing Officers showed an improved use of the Permanency Planning Meetings and that the PPMs were overall well documented, chaired by senior managers and included several professionals, including the IRO being invited to attend. Work is underway to ensure the right professionals attend PPMs – this has improved but work to improve includes the tracking of attendees at each meeting, following up with services not attending regularly and emphasising to social workers that attendees need to be given good notice.

2.2.12. Management oversight and supervision have been strengthened, with Ofsted recognising this in their visits in October 2016 and March 2017. Supervision training has been provided for managers which has impacted on quality, impact on child and effective decision making on next steps. Supervision timeliness dipped from January and March 2018 in three teams while their new managers organised supervision sessions but is now 93% overall with just one team below.

2.2.13. There is improved ownership of data in the service, with managers using performance data to challenge their team and to share good practice. The quality and usefulness of the data received has improved but there is more to be
done to ensure managers have accurate data to support them to challenge poor practice. Problems with the reliability of IT systems have made recording and approving work in a timely manner difficult but these are now improving.

2.2.14. CiN Team Managers are involved in the audit programme. This has enhanced challenge, practice improvement and oversight. Case improvement plans are formulated by managers rather than auditors to give greater ownership of the learning, good practice and areas of improvement although the quality is inconsistent and this is currently an area of focus for the team managers.

2.2.15. Turnover, vacancies and poor practice from some locums has contributed to some of the inconsistencies and performance issues highlighted. The impact on children, young people and families is significant and management oversight to work with those affected by frequent changes in social worker is recognised and is being strengthened and addressed through the refreshed workforce strategy.

2.2.16. Service developments include work with the new Family Drug and Alcohol Court (with two families currently involved), reintroducing primary school social worker links to offer consultation to schools from May 2018 and work with Family Rights Groups on a project to support mothers affected by domestic abuse. This has included training for professionals on how to support mothers where there is a risk of care proceedings being initiated. Since October 2017, 39 referrals have been made directly to Edge of Care by CiN providing young people and their families with additional, targeted support. Of these referrals, 18 were young people at risk of being accommodated. The others were assessed as being able to benefit from outreach support to progress their plan. To date two of those identified as being at risk of being accommodated have become Looked After.

2.2.17. Children / young people with severe learning difficulties, complex health needs or other complex needs are supported by the 0-25 Disability Social Work Team (0-25 DSWT). The team undertakes S47 enquiries and works with children who are the subject of CP and CiN plans. It offers a graduated response for children / young people whose main need is for a package of short breaks / respite care. The number of children subject to CP plans has reduced through the year from eight to two, with one new S47 enquiry under way in March. The team works closely with RAS, CiN and Safeguarding Standards to ensure consistency of practice and monitors practice in the same ways as other teams. Performance on timeliness of supervision dipped through August to September owing to a change of Assistant Team Manager but has improved again to 92% in March 2018.

2.2.18. At the end of 2017 the team undertook a consultation with parents / carers to review the impact of the short breaks offered and the quality of social work. The sample responding was small 24/143 (17%); however, of this sample 75% of parents identified a clear benefit from the package of support they were receiving and 94% identified that their children enjoyed attending particular services although in some cases the response was qualified. Four parents expressed concern at staff turnover, so the team is taking forward a strategy to
ensure that there is a more stable staff group. One experienced social worker has stepped up into an Interim Assistant Team Manager and steps are now being taken to finalise this position. The service has had some success converting two agency workers to permanent members of staff in the last six months.

2.3. Exploitation and Missing

2.3.1. Children at risk of exploitation and going missing are a high priority for Children’s Services and partners. Considerable progress has been made to improve the identification of the young people at risk and to improve the co-ordination of responses from the partners involved. However, more work is required to achieve a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier and different interventions to ensure more effective outcomes and improve the safety of the young people.

2.3.2. The current arrangements in place include Operational/Strategic multi-agency SEMAP meetings, weekly missing review meetings and trigger plans for high risk young people. There is a dedicated gangs resource in the YOT and a specialist team to work with children at risk of exploitation and going missing within the Children’s Social Care division.

2.3.3. Given that the range of services involved span more than one service and agency, considerable work has been undertaken to ensure that good communication and planning are in place. For example, case mapping exercises are regularly undertaken by the police and children’s services and Venn diagrams are used to identify those young people known to the various services. Those that are known to all, (SEMAP, YOT, CLA etc) are prioritised for intense review and follow up. This is helpful in planning at both an individual level but also to map geographical areas of concern and indeed houses and young people of concern and linkages between young people and potential perpetrators. Where such patterns are identified, disruption activity is put in place. Organisational changes are being considered to strengthen integrated management.

2.3.4. Within Children’s Services, a system of identification of the top-ten most vulnerable high risk young people is in place which is reviewed regularly to ensure new young people are identified and appropriate actions are being followed that are consistent with the young people’s risk and safety plans.

2.3.5. Practice standards have been introduced for working with children at risk of sexual exploitation and children who go missing and training and practice development workshops and a CSE e-learning module is now part of induction for all social workers. To date, 62% of staff have completed the training.

2.3.6. Improving management oversight and review of cases has been a focus, through weekly missing meetings, separating SEMAP into three panels (Red, Green and Amber and care leavers) and monthly ‘consecutive-red’ SEMAP meetings. To ensure senior managers have oversight of the young people at highest risk, fortnightly sessions looking at young people in multiple high-risk categories have
been introduced. Improved analysis of trends, through regular SEMAP, Missing and RHI analysis and reports and improving performance reporting on CSE and missing, including regular reports on missing episodes and RHI performance to managers and senior leaders across the Council.

2.3.7. Whilst the number of vulnerable, complex children/young people going missing has reduced and during 2017-18, 57% of missing young people only went missing once, there remains a group of young people who are repeatedly going missing (33 young people went missing 10 times or more in 2017-18) and are involved in high risk activities including county lines. Research tells us trusted relationships/ building relationships help to gain the trust to break the cycle of risky behaviour and we are rethinking our approach to working with these young people. Firstly, we are ensuring that the top ten about whom we are most concerned have permanent social workers and, second, for those in residential care that there is an allocated SCIL worker to assist in relationship building and counter the effect of previous changes in social worker. We are also trialling ‘Think Space’ sessions for social workers to reflect on alternative ways of working with very vulnerable young people at high risk of exploitation.

2.3.8. The SEMAP panel chair now identifies who holds the trusted relationship with the young person and what support they need to tailor their approach to meet needs (i.e. offering consultation with CSE team, Intensive Intervention Team (IIT), Red Thread consultation, Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV) consultation, police) as the best chance to achieve change will be through this relationship.

2.3.9. Dedicated audits on CSE and missing, including dip samples on management oversight, are followed up with actions jointly with partners. SEMAP’s monitoring allows for a picture of changes in risk; many young people referred to SEMAP have seen risk reduce over time through the support offered to them. During 2017-18, 89 young people were monitored by SEMAP. Of these, the RAG-rating improved for 71% which includes 51% (45 young people) who saw risks reduce to a level at which they no longer needed monitoring. However, for 17% the RAG-rating remained the same and for 3% it worsened (two from Amber to Red, and one from Green to Amber). The remaining 9% are care leavers who are still monitored after their 18th birthday if risks are still evident.

2.3.10. It is key that different approaches are worked through to ensure the young people receive the support they need, such as, police disruption tactics, consultation with the CSE Consultant social worker, trauma-based work with young people and their families. The CSE/Missing team are trialling the use of a signs of safety focused Safety and Risk planning mapping document for all high risk young people. The CSE/Missing Team are exploring the introduction of a trauma model that the team will be trained to use in direct work with children and families and are extending their remit to work with children at risk of exploitation generally, not only CSE.
2.3.11. Audits have shown improvements in the quality of risk assessments but there are still inconsistencies. The CSE/Missing team is therefore challenging social workers, for example, SEMAP will not approve a change in RAG-rating unless an up-to-date risk assessment accurately assesses the change in risk. The team is increasing its support by attending team meetings and offering weekly clinics. This has resulted in challenge to proposed actions and improvements to plans.

2.3.12. The number of missing episodes per month has reduced. Recording issues have indicated differences seen in the missing episodes reported by the police to the front door and those recorded on Mosaic. This is being addressed by the new Missing Business Support Officer and since February 19th missing episodes are being recorded directly on Mosaic and the positive impact of this has been demonstrated. Performance on Return Home Interviews (RHIs) is improving, with 87% offered and 75% accepted in March 2018 compared to 82% and 56% respectively twelve months earlier. However this is inconsistent and there are ongoing issues with recording and practice which are being addressed by targeting teams with young people who have the most concerning missing episodes, proactively contacting social workers to offer RHI when a young person has gone missing, and by bringing the missing work in house from 1st April 2018.

2.3.13. Audits evidence that children’s voices are being heard, although this is not always consistent or clearly recorded. Across the service, the importance of clearly recording child’s views and analysis of impact on their lived experience is being reinforced through various forums, for example in supervision, team meetings, team briefings and the Performance Board. The service is implementing actions in response to a Participation People research report which collected young people, foster carer and practitioners’ views on the CSE/missing service. There has been positive feedback from young people on interventions provided by the targeted workers in the CSE/Missing team.

2.3.14. Audits and dip samples have evidenced improved management oversight and IRO challenge on CSE/Missing children, and supervision has been strengthened across the service, although this is not yet fully consistent. Young people at the highest risk are known to senior managers and their direction on cases is recorded regularly. However, services need to ensure this is impacting on outcomes for children by ensuring that case improvement plans are discussed in supervision and actions feed into assessments and planning. The new senior management sessions on ‘contextual safeguarding’ will aid improvements here.

2.3.15. Service developments include a Sexual Health Hub in Tooting. This location was selected as young men consistently attend this Hub. Services offered include sexual health services as well as direct access confidential counselling from a male young people’s counsellor. Support to schools is in place and is growing. Recently, three schools have proactively requested SRE support, following a presentation to Headteachers. This takes the total to 12 Wandsworth secondary schools and three Wandsworth primary schools engaged in work on SRE, equating to over 3,500 students in total for this academic year.
Education Welfare Service (EWS)

2.3.16. Close monitoring of an Out of School list ensures that the status of children who are not on the roll of a school is tracked. Most children are on the list for less than six weeks and are new arrivals to the borough. In most cases, parents will be in the process of making applications for schools. There are 15 pupils currently on the list who are recorded as being out of school from between six to 16 weeks. Children Missing from Education (CME) checks are being undertaken on 9 of these. Final confirmation of the whereabouts of another three is being awaited before they are removed from the list. Three pupils have been made an offer that hasn’t yet been accepted. The EWS is in contact with these families and will consider school attendance orders if appropriate. There are an additional 15 complex cases which have been on the OOS list for longer than sixteen weeks. 12 are undergoing CME checks (e.g. housing, DWP, etc), one school attendance order is underway and a further two are being considered. Pupils are not removed from the OOS list until their whereabouts can be verified.

3. Children in Care

3.1. The Children Looked After (CLA) service provides long-term care, placements support and post permanence services to children who are in care. The service comprises three CLA teams, the adoption service, the fostering service and the post-permanence support team. The number of Children in Care has increased following the 2015 inspection from 220 to 305 at March 2018. The following actions have been taken to improve children’s outcomes and experiences.

3.2. Improvements in social work practice have been driven forward through improved management oversight and scrutiny, investment in training for social workers and their managers, and the development and implementation of practice standards. As a result, at March 2018, 100% of supervisions were held within timescale in CLA1, CLA2, and CLA3. Ninety-three percent of CLA visits were within timescale, although team level data shows even better performance in the CLA teams (98% for CLA1, 94% for CLA2 and 93% for CLA3). In addition, 100% of CLA reviews were held in timescale and 97% of reviews had evidence of the child’s participation. Audits also show improvement in the quality of social work, but it is not yet consistent. Current priorities are therefore to strengthen further the involvement of the child and strengthen the recording of the child’s voice, ensure clarity around the purpose of work, and to ensure supervision analyses the impact of work on children’s daily lives. Changes in social worker continue to have an impact despite falling vacancy and agency rates and are being addressed through the revised workforce strategy.

3.3. Finding permanent families for children is a priority. Permanency planning needs to begin earlier and a programme with Coram began in 2017 to address this. Tracking meetings and a permanency tracker have strengthened management oversight. Family finding now routinely takes place before placement orders are granted and
the adoption and post-permanency teams are routinely attending Legal Planning Meetings. More focus on early permanency placements, such as foster to adopt, is seeing more young children benefit from this type of placement at Wandsworth.

3.4. Commissioning arrangements have been strengthened through the creation of a dedicated children’s commissioning team, which works closely with the Children Looked After service. A comprehensive updated sufficiency strategy is in place and the CLA service have actions in place to improve the recruitment of foster carers and adopters. This includes a proposal to commission a specialist fostering service for adolescents with risky behaviour. A higher pay rate has been introduced for foster carers with adolescents. The fostering service doubled their enquiries in 2016/17 with 12 new carers approved between April 2017 and February 2018; compared to just 3 and 7 in preceding years. A further development area is to make more efficient use of the new in-house foster carers, particularly in emergencies.

3.5. Placement stability has also shown continuous improvement, with 10.5% of children looked after having three or more placements in March 2018 compared to 11.8% a year earlier. Performance is above inner London boroughs/statistical neighbours. The proportion placed within 20 miles also improved from 20.5% to 17.8%. A placement survey conducted by Wandsworth’s Children in Care Council found that most of children and young people surveyed felt well supported around understanding their situation, family contact, education, leisure and where to get support. For example, 31/36 children believed their wishes and feelings were always or sometimes listened to by their carer; 30/36 felt supported by their carer to have contact with their family and 30/36 felt well supported with school and homework.

3.6. To secure improvements to adoption, the structure of the adoption service has been changed to allow staff to focus on recruiting and finding adoptive families. The service also invited Coram to undertake a diagnostic and a service improvement plan was implemented with SMART actions. The focus on recruitment has resulted in 11 families recruited so far in 2017/18 (compared to five in 2016/17), 15 children were placed for adoption in 2016/17, 9 were placed in 2017/18 and two children have been placed with foster to adopt carers. Adoption timeliness has improved; excluding one legacy case, the average duration between entering care and being placed with adoptive families is now at 433 days compared to 624 in March 2017. Further improvement is a priority. A monthly forum to ensure management oversight at all stages of the adoption process is now in place and is starting to identify drift and delay and scheduling actions to progress. A Public Law Outline tracker is also now in place, with first tracking meetings chaired by Coram taking place in February 2018. A named worker has also been identified in the Adoption team to improve links with the Front Door, supporting earlier permanency planning.

3.7. Improvements to the Virtual School and an increased focus on education across the Department means that 97% of children looked after now have an up to date PEP, an increase from 91% in March 2017. The proportion of children looked after achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs at Key Stage 4 rose from 0% in 2015/16 to 26% in 2017/18. Fixed term exclusions have decreased from 10% in 2015/16 to 9% in 2016/17 and
persistent absenteeism has decreased from 14% in 2015/16 to 11% in 2016/17. More children are therefore attending school consistently and, as a result, are achieving better educational outcomes. The Virtual School Headteacher has successfully engaged local partners as corporate parents to support children looked after by providing them with access to out of school hours learning. This includes initiatives with Chelsea Football Club, Career Goal and the National Theatre, plus Letterbox Club, a Lyric Theatre project and a BBC Learning Day. Over the Easter break, young people supported a volunteering opportunity to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers at a food bank or homeless shelter.

3.8. A current priority for the service is improving the health outcomes of children looked after, in collaboration with our health partners. There has been increased scrutiny and management oversight of health data to address poor performance. The CCG has served an improvement notice on the Trust and will breach contract if necessary. Improvements are emerging: the proportion of children with an annual health check rose from 58% at November 2017 to 76% at April 2018, and the proportion of children with an annual dental check rose from 49% to 69%.

3.9. Children at risk of exploitation and going missing remains a challenge for the Children Looked After service which continue to work with the Exploitation/Missing team to keep children safe and proactively intervene to prevent exploitation and going missing. The proportion of looked after children being offered a return home interview (RHI) continues at or above the target of 95%, but it is recognised that more RHIs need to be taken up by young people, with 74% accepted at March 2018. Actions to achieve this are set out above.

3.10. The CLA service works closely with the Children in Care Council (CliCK) to ensure children’s views shape the design and delivery of services. This is one of the Council’s key strengths and has improved even further since 2015. For example, the Head of Service recently attended CliCK to discuss ‘hot topics’ such as CSE/Missing. More young people who are looked after or care leavers are now engaging through CliCK. Between January 2016 and February 2017, 132 children looked after, and care leavers were engaged with participation activities, including 30 CLA aged 13-18 and 21 aged 6-12 who were new to participation. CliCK support a range of activities including: attending Corporate Parenting Panel, engaging young people through surveys and consultations, interviewing and training staff, engaging young people out of borough, for example through Pen Pal service, and inspecting properties through the Young Inspectors’ scheme. Children and young people appreciate the support they receive through CliCK and the opportunity it provides them to make a difference for others. One young person said, ‘They (CliCK) make your life better. It’s a safe place to talk/talk to young people. They help you in so many ways and give you ideas of what you would like to do in the future.’ Another said, ‘To be involved and to be able to speak to all the professionals that I have spoken to – you have helped me so much. I feel much more confident with myself. I know my rights, I know how to get the most of my time in care! You have opened doors for me.’
3.11. Corporate parenting has been significantly strengthened, as detailed in Section 6 below. There is a new corporate parenting strategy, accompanying action plan, and performance indicators which are regularly scrutinised at Corporate Parenting Panel.

4. Care Leavers

4.1. Wandsworth’s Care Leaver Service was brought in house in September 2017, after being provided for over 20 years by Catch 22. The service was judged ‘Inadequate’ during Wandsworth’s inspection in 2015. Despite Catch 22 working with the Council to implement an agreed improvement plan, the improvement lacked pace and the Council agreed with Catch 22 to mutually end the contract early. Prior to bringing the service in house, it was benchmarked against outstanding care leaver services.

4.2. Upon bringing the leaving care service in house, the Council took several actions:

4.2.1. Asked care leavers what the service should be called to reflect its fresh start and to engage them from the very beginning. They suggested Future First. The Service was launched in October 2017 during Care Leaver’s week;

4.2.2. Invested in supporting care leavers to engage by creating two participation apprenticeship posts, both ring fenced to care leavers, and one of whom is dedicated to care leaver engagement. As a result, there is now a dedicated care leavers forum, Facebook page, dedicated Newsletter for care leavers, and an expansion of trips and engagement activity with care leavers.

4.2.3. Asked care leavers to help develop the ‘local offer’ and say how it should be communicated. The local offer was supported by councillors in February and included a commitment to pay the council tax of care leavers. It was sent to care leavers in April 2018, and promoted via social media.

4.2.4. Asked care leavers to help improve the pathway plan. Their feedback helped to shape a new plan that was introduced in February 2018. Care leavers are also currently reviewing the independence support available to young people leaving care, which they have rebranded ‘Jumpstart’.

4.2.5. Asked the team and young people how the Future First offices could be improved to make more of a space that care leavers could drop in and use. Based on their feedback the Council invested in a refurbishment of the access area for service users to make a larger, more open space, with access to computers, which was completed in December 2017.

4.2.6. Invested in the service and permanently increased the number of Personal Advisers (PAs) within the service by 2 fte to 13 and created a dedicated post to support UASC and provide advice to the team. Resources were allocated also to permanently increase the number of EET workers from 1fte to 3fte. NACRO residents have given very positive feedback about support from ETE staff.

4.2.7. Brought the service under the same management as the CLA teams to ensure one senior manager has oversight of the journey our children and young people take from CLA to care leaver and to improve joint working between the CLA and leaving care teams.

4.2.8. Identified training and development needs with the help of the Principal Social Worker. The Practice Development Lead now attends Future First
team meetings monthly to provide support to the team and ‘Total Respect’ training was delivered to Future First by young people.

4.2.9. Worked with health partners to produce health histories for several young people who we had identified had not received one. The Future First Counsellor is also proactively engaged in developing partnerships with providers, e.g. Drive Forward, Working with Men and Mind. Mind attended the care leavers forum, Future Voice, in March 2018 to gain feedback from young people for a funding bid to support Wandsworth care leavers.

4.2.10. Work has commenced on adopting the New Belongings (NB) approach. An audit of the service against the NB 10 Gold Standards took place in November 2017 and actions to address identified areas of weakness are being progressed by the Future First team. A second audit to monitor progress is scheduled for the end of March 2018.

4.3. Through these actions care leavers are now receiving a far better service than two years ago. This is supported by performance data which shows for March 2018:

4.3.1. 98% of care leavers (18+) had an up to date pathway plan. This is compared to 85% at March 2017.
4.3.2. 78% of care leavers aged 16 – 17 years had an up to date pathway plan. This is compared to 26% at March 2017.
4.3.3. 100% of supervisions were held in timescale. This is compared to 85% at August 2017 before the service came in house.
4.3.4. In touch with 92% of care leavers (17-21 years). Of those not in touch, 8 young people have gone underground due to immigration issues and 2 young people are refusing the service.
4.3.5. 90% of care leavers (17-21 years) are in suitable accommodation. The remaining 10% not in suitable accommodation are 21 young people in custody. One young person lives in a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO). No care leavers have been placed in B&B since November 2015.
4.3.6. 57% of young people supported by Future First are in Education, Employment and Training, up from 44% in December 2015. This is a priority area for further improvement.
4.3.7. The Council have so far ring-fenced five apprenticeships. In addition, two care leavers have also been offered (and taken up) fixed term employment with the Council in the last 12 months. One of these placements resulted in the young person gaining a permanent job in her chosen field.

4.4. As Ofsted observed in the December 2017 monitoring visit, the Council is aware of key areas requiring improvement and is taking steps to address these, as follows:

4.4.1. Improving the quality of case recording, ensuring it is consistent and detailed. The Team Manager now authorises all pathway plans to strengthen management oversight and drive improvements in the quality. An additional fixed term deputy was appointed in December 2017 to embed expectations on supervision and management oversight. Performance data is reviewed weekly by the Team Manager and the Assistant Director. Pathway plans are reviewed through supervision. The team received training on pathway planning in November and
more recently, in March 2018, focused on reflective practice in group supervision. The Deputy Manager has also received training in supervision.

4.4.2. Improving the quality of Pathway Plans, ensuring they are routinely informed by assessments of risk and are up to date. The new plan went live in February 2018 and feedback so far from personal advisers is very positive. It is expected that the new plan will also help improve timeliness as they are less burdensome. The Future First Office Manager now circulates weekly to personal advisers a list of pathway plans overdue, due and due imminently to improve planning.

4.4.3. Ensuring that care leavers receive timely support to start preparing them for independence, and that this is reflected in pathway plans, alongside evidence of entitlements – care leavers helped refresh independence materials which were out of date and not fit for purpose. The Future First Preparation Group is offering more young people independence skills. Young people also aligned the new My Pathway Plan design to the Local Offer to make it easier to link with entitlements. The Future First Team Manager will be undertaking a dip sample of cases to see whether the independence support that young people receive is being reflected in case records and pathway plans, including the child’s voice.

4.4.4. Providing more clarity around the option for young people to ‘Stay Put’ with their foster carers – the HoS CLA is leading a Task and Finish Group to review the Council’s policy and how it can be better promoted as performance is low (13). The Council has strengthened the importance of early planning with the foster carer and the young person in the policy and has agreed with foster carers to pay them directly to encourage more foster carers to offer the arrangement.

4.4.5. Strengthening support for young people placed in custody ensuring that these young people are prepared for independence and routinely engaging with probation service - the Probation Service attended the Future First team meeting in March 2018 to strengthen links and share good practice. A revised practice standard requires personal advisers to visit young people in custody every six weeks, or more frequently in the run up to their release. In February, the Director of Children’s Services chaired a special complex placements meeting on young people in custody to review the support provided and identify actions to prepare the young people for independence on release e.g. ensuring they have photo ID, working with the placements team and incorporating work with young BME men in the Early Help Strategy and Commissioning Plan.

4.4.6. Ensuring care leavers have access to their full health history and this is included in their pathway plans – when the service came in house it was found that 146 care leavers did not have a health passport. This was addressed immediately with the CCG Designated Nurse, who worked closely with Future First to rectify. The service is working with the Performance Team to develop an 18+ health plan which can be embedded into pathway plan, which should make the system more robust. The Team Manager for Future First will also undertake a dip sample of pathway plans and health histories to ensure they are consistent.
5. Safeguarding Standards

5.1. The Safeguarding Standards Service (SSS) quality assures children’s services. Its key purpose is to ensure that children looked after and children in need of protection receive the best possible outcomes. Following the 2015 Ofsted judgement several significant changes to improve outcomes for children have been introduced:

5.1.1. remodelling the Children’s Planning and Review Team so that staff adopt a specialist role within either child protection or children looked after and the IRO service becomes more professionalised;
5.1.2. reducing the number of children on Child Protection Plans by introducing a strategy to improve practice and increase quality assurance of thresholds;
5.1.3. strengthening the child’s voice by revision of key consultation documents and piloting child-centred CLA review documents;
5.1.4. improving the Quality Assurance Framework by revision and strengthening of the audit programme and implementing a ‘Learning from Practice’ pilot;
5.1.5. better embedding audit processes by increasing practitioner engagement and linking it to practice development work in the Social Care Academy and by increased reporting of audit outcomes into key governance structures; and
5.1.6. introducing a Practice Learning Week where managers audit cases, observe practice and meet families and partners in January 2018. Feedback from the pilot showed that practitioners found it a positive experience that helped them to reflect on practice, that direct feedback from families was helpful, that auditors were open. As a result, the model is being developed further to take place quarterly throughout the next 12 months.
5.1.7. strengthening the LADO function by reviewing the efficiency of the service; identifying a dedicated worker, revising key documents and increasing awareness both internally and across the partnership.

5.2. The remodelling of the Children’s Planning and Review Team was successfully implemented in January 2018. This was supported by the recruitment of permanent Safeguarding Children Managers and recruitment is underway for the remaining two vacant CPC/IRO posts currently covered by agency staff. There has been a revision of the CPC/IRO job role and a re-evaluation of the pay scales to ensure the role reflected the Quality Assurance (QA) function and expectation. The Children’s Planning and Review Team has been given additional locum capacity to ensure demand is met and that caseloads enable practice development to continue.

5.3. The numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans (CPP) has steadily fallen from a peak of 417 at June 2017, to 373 by September and then 332 by December 2017. By end of March 2018 there were 288 children subject to CPP (46.6 per 10,000). Conversion rates from Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) to CPP remain consistent across the year and audit of 50+ children made subject to CPP between December 2017 and February 2018 shows thresholds are consistently and correctly applied by Child Protection Coordinators making Child Protection Plans.
5.4. Children’s participation in Children Looked After (CLA) reviews has continued to improve with latest data showing 97% of reviews where children participated. 100% of CLA reviews were in timescale from January 2017 to July 2017. Following a dip to 93% in July 2017, increased scrutiny and tracking improved performance to 100% in December 2017. This performance has been maintained since. Key consultation documents have been revised and redesigned with young people from the Council’s Children In Care Council ‘CLICK’. To further build on this the IROS are piloting using a child centred CLA review form to confirm to children looked after the issues discussed and the decisions made. The pilot will last for 3 months and the impact of this upon children engagement and how well they feel informed will be evaluated.

5.5. Key performance indicators have improved steadily across the last year. While there are still improvements to make the direction is positive:

5.5.1. the total number of children subject to a child protection plan has reduced from 369 at January 2017 to 288 at March 2018, a 22% reduction;
5.5.2. 88% of Initial Conferences (ICPC) were held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at March 2018, compared to 79% at March 2017, though this sometimes presented challenges for schools due to short notice; and
5.5.3. In March 2018, 95% of Review Conferences (RCPCs) were held on time.

5.6. The engagement of children within Child Protection Conferences still needs to improve. Most social work reports reflect children’s wishes and feelings but direct attendance is still low. In response to this the following actions are in progress:

5.6.1. leaflets to children explaining what a Child Protection Conference is and making provision for their views to be submitted;
5.6.2. invitation letters to all children aged 12 years and over to introduce the Child Protection Coordinator and provide opportunities for engagement
5.6.3. dedicated e-mail address for children’s consultation;
5.6.4. the introduction of weekly reporting on attendance by children;
5.6.5. taken action to improve parents’ willingness to attend e.g. better facilities.

5.7. The Safeguarding Children Managers have revised the management tracker and increased supervision frequency to build on practice improvement as it’s is not yet consistent across the Children’s Planning and Review Team.

5.8. The timeliness of responses to Dispute Resolution alerts still needs improvement to ensure a positive impact for children. In response, the recording workflow has been revised and workshops were held at the end of April 2018 to address practice.

5.9. The use of the Return Home checklist for children reunified with their parents is still not sufficiently embedded in practice and the positive impact on children is still too variable. Although practice has improved through the introduction of the checklist more work is required. The plan to address this includes a dip sample in early May to identify further the extent of compliance and understanding and briefings in team meetings and management meetings by the Safeguarding Children Manager (children looked after) to disseminate and promote good practice.
6. Leadership, Management and Governance

6.1. There is a strong engagement and commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people from the political leadership of the Council. The Leader attends the Improvement Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel and requires quarterly updates on performance to be submitted to him alongside commentary for any areas where performance is not on target. His commitment is evident in his approval for the use of reserves to increase capacity across Children’s Social Care.

6.2. The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services is engaged and challenges the service to improve outcomes for young people. Cllr Sarah McDermott, was appointed in May 2017. This was part of succession planning as the previous long serving Cabinet Member had indicated she would retire in 2018. This transition was positively commented on in the July DfE Review. The Cabinet Member attends the Improvement Board, Corporate Parenting Panel, Education and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and all sub-groups and has monthly meetings with the DCS and her team. She triangulates the outcome of these meetings through engagement with children looked after, care leavers and foster carers and uses their feedback to identify areas for improvement. Her impact has most recently been seen in the Council’s decision to pay the council tax of care leavers, which is an action she instigated and personally championed with her colleagues.

6.3. Member scrutiny of the services for children and young people and their impact has improved on 2015. This has been led by Members who instigated an additional scrutiny meeting specifically focussing on Children’s Social Care (CSG). The CSG is held six times a year and is well attended by members of the Education and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ECSOSC). In these meetings Members now drill down into practice areas by visiting services (e.g. the MASH) and partners, reviewing audit reports and questioning officers on specific service areas.

6.4. The CSG meeting builds on the scrutiny exercised at the ECSOSC which in the past 18 months has scrutinised the re-structure of Children’s Social Care, the decision to bring leaving care back in house and to redevelop the service alongside routine challenge of performance measures. The impact of councillors’ scrutiny was reviewed by Members in January 2018. This found evidence that Member insight into and challenge to Children’s Services has been expanded and strengthened. Examples of challenge included Members calling in the Head of IT on Mosaic performance, identifying visits to services including Family Centres and Wimbledon Youth Court and actively engaging in target setting through Member workshops.

6.5. There is a strong engagement and commitment to improving outcomes from the Chief Executive who attends the Improvement Board, receives quarterly updates on Children’s Services performance and uses this to hold the DCS to account for performance and the quality of practice at Directors’ Board. He visits teams across Children’s Services and as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, he meets with children looked after and care leavers three times a year. He also meets the
Department’s Improvement Partner 1-2-1 and the Chair of the Safeguarding Board. As a result, he can triangulate information on Children’s Services and has a line of sight on areas for improvement. His commitment can be seen in the well-attended Corporate Parenting Panel, the active inclusion of young people in this meeting and in support for increasing awareness of corporate parenting across chief officers.

6.6. There is a commitment to improving outcomes and working together from partners. Health, police and local head teachers all actively engage in the Improvement Board with health colleagues also regularly attending the Corporate Parenting Board. The impact of these relationships on frontline practice and the environment in which social workers work with children and their families can be seen in:

6.6.1. partner participation in the MASH which has seen staff co-located (police, early help, edge of care, and twice weekly Family Recovery Project); health needs to improve further (see details in Section 2 of this report);

6.6.2. the increase in police participation in strategy discussions (currently 98%);

6.6.3. the on-going engagement of schools in the early help process where they are the main source of Early Help Assessments - feedback is positive; and

6.6.4. improvements in health participation in strategy meetings from 29% in 2016-17 to 44% in January 2018. This is still low and discussions have taken place recently between the Council and health partners to improve this further.

6.7. Feedback is sought from judges and the Council’s legal team to improve outcomes and timeliness for children. This is achieved by the Assistant Director for Children and Families meeting quarterly with judges and bi-monthly with the Council’s legal team. There is good engagement with the judiciary with the meetings seeing honest communication and being solution focussed. Meetings with the legal team are focussed on outcomes for children, including timeliness. A further improvement needed is to reinstate regular meetings with Cafcass, currently under discussion.

6.8. To increase opportunities and services that young people can access, the Council also engages with voluntary sector providers. Recently, this has resulted in a bid with MIND to the Goldsmiths’ Company to increase emotional and mental health support for care leavers and work with Chelsea Football Club and the Lyric Theatre on educational and enrichment opportunities for children and young people.

6.9. There is a strong political commitment to corporate parenting. This is seen in the revised and re-launched Corporate Parenting Panel, which is open to all Councillors. Average attendance at Panel meetings in 2017/18 was 18 (excluding officers) where in 2015 there was limited Member engagement. The minutes show attendance by councillors from Adult, Community Services and Corporate Resources Committees. Attendees also include the CCG and Foster Carer Association.

6.10. The Council commitment to corporate parenting has also been strengthened with the Chief Executive and DCS leading work to embed corporate parenting across all Council Departments. This has resulted in the Housing Department allocating additional properties in 2017/18 for care leavers and foster carers, with the
provision of the training flat led by the Chair of Housing & Regeneration OSC. Offers of work placements are made in businesses owned by Members. It is also reflected in the mentoring scheme for Children Looked After, which sees 16 officers from across the council act as mentors to children looked after.

6.11. The focus for corporate parenting for the next 6 months is translating this corporate commitment into more apprenticeships for care leavers across the Council. Each Director has nominated a senior manager to take forward work to support care leavers. As detailed in Section 4, this is showing green shoots.

6.12. Senior leaders in the department have driven innovation as well as improvements in practice. Actions to achieve this have included:

6.12.1. developing a much better line of sight to the front door, having much better performance information, undertaking regular scrutiny of high risk cases and being more open to challenge, for example, from our Improvement Partner;

6.12.2. driving the development of the new vision for Children’s Services through an end-to-end review started in 2016 and putting in place the new Early Help strategy, the edge of care team and the new adolescent CiN and CLA teams;

6.12.3. recognising the benefits of working with and learning from other councils and organisations, such as the work to develop early permanence with Coram and extension of the early help offer through the Early Intervention Foundation;

6.12.4. engaging directly with frontline staff, team managers, organising whole staff workshops and attending service meetings, such as in CiN and Future First.

6.13. The February 2018 DfE review noted that, ’There is a palpable energy and enthusiasm about the changes of culture, the visibility of senior leaders and the opportunities for staff. There is huge enthusiasm among staff for making sure that things continue to improve.’

6.14. To drive improvements in social work practice and identify areas for improvement the Department has now embedded its performance management framework. The Assistant Director for Children and Families meets with her managers weekly to go through performance data. A monthly Performance Board chaired by the Deputy Director is also in place which engages team managers in reviewing performance alongside audit findings to identify both performance and practice improvements. Examples of how this performance and audit information is being used include the creation of the additional assessment and CiN teams in response to the significant increase in referrals following weekly caseload monitoring. These extra capacity roles will remain in place while the number of cases remains high; however, the Department is taking action to reduce volumes through implementing Thrive (its Early Help Strategy) and the implementation of an Edge of Care Team.

6.15. Recently performance data has shown that timeliness is an area for improvement at the Front Door. In response to this the Department has created a 4th Assessment Team from within existing resources to allow assessment teams more time off duty.
to complete and write up visits. As a result, the proportion of assessments completed within 45 days has risen from 56% overall in February 2018 to over 90% overall in the first three weeks of April, with three teams at 100% in time.

6.16. Audits show that social work practice has continued to improve but consistency remains an issue. The latest overview submitted to Members shows that there is still further work to do to ensure cases are consistently graded good and this is an area of focus. To embed service improvements, quarterly summaries of audits and case improvement plans are now routinely drawn up and reported to the Improvement Board and CSG.

6.17. Following the 2015 inspection, the Council increased senior leadership capacity at directorate level as well as the front line. Subsequently, permanent heads of service have been appointed where there were vacancies (e.g. Head of CLA) and created the new team manager and assistant team manager posts. All these are impacting positively, for example, in the improved supervision performance and better management oversight. As part of the workforce strategy, succession planning is considered, for example, one Head of Service is currently on a London leadership programme and another on a Leaders for London practice leadership programme.

6.18. In November 2017, the Social Care Academy was launched, with 4 workstreams incorporating the workforce strategy aimed at recruiting, developing and supporting the retention of the social care workforce. Its first annual report highlighted the strengths of the current offer including: ‘growing our own’ through Frontline and Step Up; the ASYE programme quality and increasing ASYE numbers; the quality of placements offered to HEI students; the Post Qualifying training to social workers; and innovative programmes offered such as Youth at Risk management coaching programme, a five-day course for over 115 managers that has underpinned the change in culture in the department. Other strengths are the continued embedding of Signs of Safety, the service practice framework, through training and mentoring in group supervision; and the engagement of staff in an annual Social Work Health check which is leading to tangible changes in the working environment. Improvement priorities are: the need for stronger links between appraisal, staff development and commissioned training; the need to develop new recruitment promotional material; Wandsworth visibility at sector recruitment events; and induction. These are being actively tackled.