

**CHILDREN
& FAMILIES**

Annual Report

2020/21



Working for every **child**

 **Hackney**

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Children and Families Service annual report for 2020/21.

This has been a challenging year marked by the Covid 19 pandemic, the impact of the criminal cyber attack in October 2020 and significant changes in leadership. The Hackney Children and Families workforce has shown great resilience, making a difference to the lives of vulnerable children whilst constantly focusing on learning and improving practice.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted how we worked with children and their families over the last eighteen months. Overnight on 23rd March 2020, schools closed to most pupils, much of the Children and Families Service became 'virtual' and staff and multi-agency colleagues found new ways to work under national lockdown. I have seen our staff work tirelessly to maintain meaningful and effective relationships with children and

families, to provide additional support to domestic abuse victims, to ensure children continued to receive free school meals and that those in need were provided with internet access or devices to continue their education remotely. The progression of the vaccination programme has meant key workers in Hackney were able to resume all face to face statutory visits to children in March 2021, and from July 2021 the Children and Families Service has returned to using the office space on a rota basis.

Hackney Council was the victim of a serious cyberattack in October 2020. For the Children and Families Service, the attack meant that the social care management system (Mosaic) and document management systems (Comino and eDOCS) were unavailable. We took immediate steps to safeguard and support children and families including working closely with partner agencies to gather essential information. We

also took immediate action so that practitioners could continue to record their work from the first day of the cyberattack and we have built an interim social care recording system. We rebuilt our live performance reporting system (Qliksense) and with our ICT colleagues worked to recover information from our historic records. A read-only version of Mosaic has been available from June 2021 and the aim is for all case recording to be completed on a new Mosaic system from April 2022.

We continue to recognise that racism and oppression remains prevalent in Britain today and is systemic and endemic across society. In July 2020, Children and Families Services committed to create and implement our anti-racist action plan. Our Anti-Racist Position Statement makes clear the journey we need to take as a service to improve the experience of the children and families of Hackney who are disproportionately affected

by racism, as well as the experience and progression of staff. A new Diversity and Inclusion Lead started in role in the Children and Families Service in June 2021, and this role will steer and champion the work of the anti-racist action plan.

Throughout 2020/21 there have been a number of changes to senior leadership impacting on the Children and Families Service. A stable senior management team is now in place: the new permanent Director of Children's Social Care started in June 2021, with the new Group Director for Children and Education starting in August 2021 and a new Chief Executive starting in October 2021. Within the Children and Families Service, a new permanent Head of Corporate Parenting was appointed in October 2021.

In May 2021, Hackney Youth Justice Service participated in a HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic inspection on the theme

Councillor Anntoinette Bramble

Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member
for Education, Young People and
Children's Social Care



of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system. Overall inspectors found “significant deficits” in the quality of work conducted nationally by youth offending services and partner agencies with black and mixed heritage boys and made a total of 18 recommendations. However, Inspectors named Hackney as a good practice example for the effective use of data to assess the quality and impact of service delivery for this cohort of boys and were positive about our practice in this area during their verbal feedback to senior leaders. It is painful to read about the disproportionate numbers of black and mixed heritage boys in the

youth offending service, this points us to look across the system and at the help and support we could be offering at a much earlier stage. We are continuing to learn and improve our services based on the findings of this national thematic inspection.

In July 2021, Ofsted undertook a two-day focused visit in Hackney on the theme of arrangements for children in need or subject to a child protection plan. They found evidence of dedicated scrutiny by senior leaders and strengthened management oversight, that risk to children is understood and responded to appropriately, and clear planning and decision-making provide direction and clarity to our

work. Most importantly, inspectors found that children are safe. We welcome this feedback, the advice on where to strengthen our practice and the recognition that we are on a positive journey of improvement. We know that we have further work to do to achieve consistently good practice to meet our aspiration to provide good and outstanding services for our children and families in Hackney.

As we reflect on the past year I once again find myself inspired by the tireless work of all those who make up the Children and Families Service. In the face of a global pandemic and a cyberattack, often battling challenging personal circumstances,

the service has continued to strive for excellent outcomes for the children and families of Hackney, keeping them at the heart of all our work.

As we consider the coming year I am excited by the prospect of our continued journey of improvement with a stable and dedicated senior management team and our highly skilled workforce. Our new improvement plan is focusing on our aspirations for the service, really hearing the child’s voice, a self knowing and confident service and practice that is manifestly anti-racist.

Key data about the Children and Families Service



2,930 referrals were received in 2020/21, a 42% decrease from 5,031 received in the previous year.



3,858 social work assessments were completed, a 22% decrease from the 4,923 completed in 2019/20.



237 children were supported on Child Protection Plans as at 31 March 2021, a 3% decrease compared to 245 children at the same time in 2020.



An estimated total of 6,179 young people accessed universal services offered through Young Hackney during 2020/21, based on 58,047 named and anonymous attendances. This reflected a reduction of 72% of named individuals accessing Young Hackney Universal services from 2019/20, linked to pandemic lockdown periods.



426 children were looked after as at 31 March 2021, a 1% decrease from 432 children at the same time the previous year.



182 children entered care during 2020/21, a 21% decrease from 229 children in 2019/20.



72 young people aged between 14 and 17 entered care in 2020/21, a large decrease compared to 119 young people from this cohort entering care in 2019/20. This represented 40% of the total number of children who entered care in 2020/21, compared to 52% in 2019/20.



10% of looked after children had three or more care arrangements in 2020/21, compared to 12% in 2019/20.



77% of children who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years were in stable care arrangements of more than 2 years in 2020/21, an improvement from 64% in 2019/20.

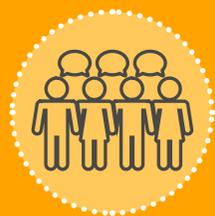


376 care leavers aged between 17 and 21 were being supported by the Leaving Care service at 31 March 2021, a 12% increase compared to 335 at the same point in 2020.

Priorities for the year ahead



1. Proud to be Hackney: We will reset the Practice Model for Hackney Children's Services, so it describes a whole system approach to supporting children and families. The refreshed vision of practice will describe our values and principles. It will outline how children and families can expect to be supported from education, early help right through to leaving care or transition to adult services. Every practitioner will employ a systemic approach as a way of understanding the lived experience of our children and families. We will focus on relationships and work collaboratively. We will always recognise that individuals are embedded in their social context and remain curious about this. This practice model will enable us all to understand our roles and responsibilities as part of a wider system supporting Hackney children. It will focus on making a difference for every child.



2. Proud to keep children safe and listen to children and families in the shaping of our services: Our practice will ensure that the voices of children and their loved ones will shape the multi-agency plans of support that are offered to them. We will strengthen our commitment to ensuring that all children and families have the opportunity to share their experiences with us, in order to inform the strategic development of our services.



3. Proud to work with partner agencies to help children and families get the right support at the right time: We will support the ongoing development of a culture within Hackney where we work collaboratively to hear the voices of children and families with the aim of co-creating solutions as a partnership to meet children's needs in order to improve outcomes for children. We will hear and be appreciative of multiple professionals' perspectives and voices about how children's needs can best be met and ensure as a partnership that we are clear on our roles, responsibilities and associated powers.



4. Proud to work with partners to improve safety for adolescents in the community: We will foster trusted relationships with young people within which they will experience safety in the context of their families, peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. Young people in Hackney will achieve positive outcomes, agency and independence as a result of responsive support and engagement informed by knowledge of adolescent development and contextual safeguarding.



5. Proud to be Anti-Racist: Our leadership and practice will address racism and discrimination leading to disproportionality in the experiences of our children and families and of our staff in the workplace whilst also seeking to influence the broader context of our children and families lives



6. Proud to promote a learning culture focused on outcomes for children, where great practice can flourish: Our Quality Assurance Framework and Workforce Development Strategy are inextricably linked enabling us to become an organisation that focuses upon learning and development-quality assurance activities are embedded across the service at all levels and drive practice improvement with a strong commitment to feedback mechanisms to support learning, promote consistently good or better practice achieve best outcomes for our children



7. Proud to support our workforce to do their very best for children in Hackney: We recognise that having a skilled, resilient, stable and engaged workforce, equipped with the tools they need to do their jobs well, is crucial to achieving the best possible outcomes for children. We acknowledge that this requires a relentless focus on the recruitment, development and retention of staff. We want to demonstrate that we are proud of our staff and want them to be proud of working for Hackney's children. We hope to promote Hackney as a great place to build a career working with children and families.



The Experiences and Progress of Children Who Need Help and Protection

We are proud of our response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic; with services and practice adapting to meet the needs of our children and families in this period. We have re-modelled our 'front door', launching the Hackney MASH in July 2021. This change has provided clarity of thresholds for partners and our own practitioners with more families accessing early help more quickly. We have improved the timeliness of our assessments as well as clearer management oversight and quicker decision making for

children. This means that children are more likely to get access to early help quicker, will only be subjects of statutory plans when necessary and increasingly or the appropriate length of time to ensure their needs are met. There is good work taking place across the service but our focus is on ensuring consistency of support to all of our children and families. There is more work to do to ensure the quality of plans and that children's case records are up to date, including records of visits to children.



“We are proud of our response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic...”





Early Help

Early Help Review

In 2019 it was agreed by senior officers and councillors that a review of Hackney Council's internal Early Help model should be undertaken. This review was intended to give confidence that Hackney's Early Help model is still fit for purpose and that it will continue to be so in the coming years. The review covers Early Years and Children's Centres, Young Hackney and the Family Support Service. The review was paused for a period of 6 months due to the impact of the pandemic, with activity resuming in January 2021. The review has identified short, medium and long term priorities which will be brought to Cabinet in January 2022. As part of the preparation for the delivery of these priorities, and to strengthen the front door identification of risk, the Context Intervention Unit has moved into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). In addition to this the three Children in Need Family Support Units from the Family Intervention and Support Service have moved across to the Early Help Family Support Service.



Young Hackney is the Council's early help, prevention and diversion service for children and young people aged 6-19 years old and up to 25 years if the young person has a special education need or disability. The service works with young people to support their development and transition to adulthood by intervening early to address adolescent risk, develop prosocial behaviours and build resilience.

An estimated total of 6,179 young people accessed universal services offered through Young Hackney during 2020/21, based on named and anonymous attendances. This reflected a reduction of 72% of named individuals accessing Young Hackney Universal services from 2019/20 when 22,787 named individuals accessed Young Hackney provision. This reduction is due to the impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions; including social distancing measures and school closures. Youth Hubs were closed in line with Government requirements and re-opened when they were able to, with appropriate measures in place. There were 58,047 attendances by named children and young people aged 6-19 years during 2020/21, compared to 170,780 during 2019/20 at the wider youth provision delivered through Young Hackney and commissioned services for young people. This has increased for the first 6 months of 2021/22 with 63,351 attendances from April-September 2021 recorded. To support covid messaging, intervene in contexts of harm and to support emotional wellbeing, Young Hackney conducted regular detached outreach work (10 sessions per week) throughout the pandemic. A 'virtual youth hub' offering activities and

support operated during lockdowns when national guidance restricted group activities.

Young Hackney delivered targeted support to 1,834 young people in 2020/21, a 28% increase compared to the 1,434 interventions delivered in 2019/20. The average number of days that children and their families were supported by Young Hackney as at 1st April 2021 was 216 days, a higher average than a year ago of 189 days. This increase may be a reflection of the impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions, and the challenges

of undertaking direct work with young people as frequently as was possible when restrictions were not in place.

Audits of the Young Hackney Service undertaken in April 2021 reviewing case recordings indicate that practice requires improvement, with key decisions generally recorded on file, unit meeting minutes generally up to date, and decision-making forum key minutes on file. Auditors found well-recorded discussions with managers on file, although in general recording required improvement.

Evidence of Impact

The Early Help Review will strengthen our learning about the impact of our early help work around a clear quality assurance framework. Feedback about the service is gathered from children and families. Some highlights over the past year include:

- *“Thank you for all the support. I really enjoyed our meetings and having a safe time to talk about things that were bothering me. You helped me to be myself and not worry about getting into trouble for saying how I felt. You have also helped me to think why getting good GCSEs is important and my future.”*
Feedback from a young person about their Young Hackney worker
- *“It was a good experience to be able to build trust and speak with professionals, because sometimes things can be hard to keep to yourself.”*
Feedback from a young person about Young Hackney support
- *“It helped to make amends and with my feelings and stuff I have been through. I have learnt so much more now than I ever have and I didn’t think I would receive the help I did from you. I liked talking to someone about what’s going on in my head, I feel like it really helped, as I did not have someone outside of*

family to do that with.”
Feedback from a young person about Prevention and Diversion support

- *“All the support, I never got the support with school until you came along, when you weren’t here, me and my Mum were struggling, but then you helped that. Relationship has massively improved with my Mum, thanks to you. Like it helped me with my emotions, made me feel calm, stay out of trouble and be a better person.”*
Feedback from a young person about their Prevention and Diversion worker
- *“Our Young Hackney worker has been a godsend, she supported us and worked wonders with my child, she has also been a great support to me in many moments in which I was discouraged she gave me precious advice, she became kind of part of my family. My child is now doing very well, he matured a lot and I think Young Hackney has played a very important role in his life supporting and listening to him. Our Young Hackney worker managed to gain his trust and my child opened up to her and he knew he could count on her at times he needed. I cannot be grateful enough for the support our Young Hackney worker has given us both.”*
A parent’s feedback about their Young Hackney worker

- *“I felt that my Young Hackney worker was always very supportive and attended the most important meetings around my son’s education. It’s thanks to them that my son got the diagnoses finally, the worker was very persistent with the school and external services. She always tried to make contact with my son and built a good relationship with him, she was a very good spokesperson for him and always understood what I was going through as a mother. She was encouraging and praised my efforts a lot which really enforced my parenting. I’m very thankful to Young Hackney for their support during some difficult times.”* **Feedback from a young person’s mother about her Young Hackney worker**

- *“The Young Hackney worker has gone out of his way to support both me and my daughter. I have appreciated his offer to follow-up things for me and really valued the time he has offered to listen to me. The Young Hackney worker has consistently been there for my daughter, which has been having a positive impact on her. I feel like the Young Hackney worker genuinely cares for my daughter’s well-being, and I was very grateful and thankful for having him as part of our support network.”* **Feedback from a young person’s parent about their Young Hackney worker**
- *“ I would just like to thank you for your time, I have seen so many better things since your work with him, so thank you thank you thank you.”* **A parent’s feedback about their Prevention and Diversion worker**



Youth Justice

The Youth Justice Service works with all young people in Hackney who are arrested or convicted of crimes and undertakes youth justice work including bail and remand supervision and supervising young people who have been given community or custodial sentences. Young people are supported by a multi-agency team including a Forensic Psychologist, the Virtual School, Speech and Language Therapists, the Police, a Nurse, Probation Services, a Substance Misuse Worker and a Dealing Officer.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
No. of first time entrants to Youth Justice system in Hackney	82	88	79

The overall number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time in Hackney in 2020/21 was 79, a decrease from 88 young people in 2019/20. This reduction in numbers has largely been influenced by the pandemic and associated lockdowns which has seen a reduction in overall conviction rates across London, as well as lengthy waits at all stages of the criminal justice process across the country. With courts returning to some normality of process in recent months, Hackney has seen a return to pre-lockdown rates of first time entrants to the youth justice system, with 38 first time entrants during April-September 2021. However, Hackney’s first time entrant rate remains below the rates seen by comparator youth offending teams according to most recently available data.

The most recent national reoffending figures for Hackney relate to October 2018 to September 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the Youth Justice Board’s ability to access the Police National Database. The average number of re-offences per child who reoffends for England and Wales is 3.8; in Hackney this is 2.6. We assess this comparatively strong performance as

being related to the strategic, management and practice approaches taken across Hackney by the local authority and its partners.

94% of the young people referred to the Youth Justice Prevention and Diversion Team via Triage in 2020/21 were successfully diverted from becoming first time entrants to the youth justice system. However, early help for young people at risk of becoming involved in crime is still not effective enough at preventing the most serious youth crime: the small number of young people referred to the Prevention and Diversion Team from Triage who have gone on to enter the youth justice system have in many cases faced extremely serious charges against them. The number of youth diversion work referrals that the Prevention and Diversion Team is receiving from the police experienced a slight increase from 117 in 2019/20 to 127 in 2020/21.

In May 2021, Hackney Youth Justice Service participated in a HMI Probation

thematic inspection on the theme of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system. Inspectors considered Hackney's Out of Court Disposal work a strength, with black and mixed heritage boys successfully diverted from Court. Inspectors were also impressed by Hackney's assessment tool (created following a Youth Justice Board peer review in 2019) which considers structural disadvantage. Hackney was cited as a good practice example in the thematic inspection report for the effective use of data to assess the quality and impact of service delivery. There were recommendations for all Youth Offending Teams to improve practice in this area, and the Hackney Youth Justice Service will be focusing on further developing the Service's existing reducing disproportionality action plan. This includes working to develop the deferred prosecution scheme; developing trauma informed and anti-racist practice within the partnership and improving parental engagement and the voice of the child.

Evidence of Impact

In December 2021, HMI Probation published the 'Effective practice guide - Black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system Based on: A thematic inspection of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system'. Hackney Youth Justice Service was used as an example of effectiveness for tackling disproportionality in stop and searches and in out-of-court-disposals. The foundation for these approaches was a solid evidence base to enable it to understand disparity and over-representation in terms of ethnicity but also vulnerability - where children were in care or subject to child protection processes.

Stop and search

Hackney Young Futures Commission (2,400 young people aged 10-25 in Hackney were consulted about their experience of life

in Hackney) found that young people were concerned about the approach to stop and searches in Hackney. The Safer Young Hackney Strategic Board raised this and the Police Chief Inspector agreed to audit searches in May 2020. 74 searches were reviewed and showed that officers were not always following the expected procedure and that recording could be improved. As a result of this, the supervisors of those officers were contacted with the review findings, and the Chief Inspector asked the learning and training division to revisit stop and search training with the results of this audit. This *"allowed a much more open conversation about searches, and Youth Offending Service practitioners are now much more likely to advocate on behalf of the children, asking the police to review cases and, if necessary, support complaints."*

Out of court disposals

Hackney Youth Justice Service performs well compared to the national trend of underrepresentation of ethnic minority children in Youth Offending Team out-of-court cohorts. This is in part due to a considered out-of-court disposal assessment, developed by Young Hackney, the Youth Justice Service, the speech and language team. This is also supported by clear communication materials with children and their families - HMI Probation thanked Hackney for sharing these key documents as a good practice example for the practice guide. The other key aspects of the approach in Hackney include strong partnership work, our youth work model engagement, and work with police colleagues. The outcomes are

fed back to the officer in charge regarding progress, outcome and, where appropriate, the next steps, even for informal disposals. This *“builds confidence in the service for black and mixed heritage boys, specifically:*

- *the process is transparent*
- *it is explained in understandable language, which builds trust*
- *they get the experience of being listened to*
- *people are able to opt for the decision which is less damaging for the future.”*



Domestic Abuse Intervention Service

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS) works with anyone experiencing domestic abuse who is living in Hackney, aged 16 or over, of any sex and gender, and of any sexual orientation. The service works with clients and partner agencies to assess and reduce risk and offers an assertive, interventionist, social-work-informed approach to protecting victims from harm, using the Safe and Together model which aims to reduce the necessity for the removal of children into care by holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour and

protecting survivors of domestic abuse. The service also intervenes with perpetrators of domestic abuse to reduce the risk they pose. The service leads within the Council and across the partnership on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls and on providing and developing Hackney's Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for 'high risk' cases and delivers training also to partner agencies.

Following an initial rise of up to 60 % in referrals at the beginning of the Covid restrictions period, referral numbers to DAIS fluctuated then stabilised over the course of 2020/21. The average weekly number of referrals across 2020/21 was 26, slightly above the weekly pre-Covid rate of 25 cases per week. From April 2021 to November 2021 there has been an average weekly referral rate of 25 cases.

The fortnightly MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a multi-agency meeting to discuss and take action on cases of domestic abuse where there is a 'high risk' of death or serious injury. Numbers have continued to rise during and following the Covid restrictions. 2020/21 saw a total of 595 cases discussed at MARAC, an increase of 21 % on the 492 cases heard in 2019/20. If the rate from April - September 2021 is maintained across the remainder of this year, there will be 734 cases heard, an increase of 23 % on 2020/21. This will represent a 49 % increase in two years of high-risk domestic abuse being identified. The MARAC has continued throughout and since the Covid restrictions period to operate successfully, moving immediately to an online fortnightly meeting. Police, the Council and partner agencies have found the online forum to be

more efficient regarding multi-agency participation, sharing information before and during the meeting and agreeing joint actions to reduce harm. Throughout the Covid restrictions period DAIS was offering in-person meetings as needed and this remains the case. The Perpetrator Programme has been delivered virtually for public health reasons and this is not felt to have had a negative impact on uptake as where people have not been

able to access virtual groups they have been offered in-person one-to-one programme work. Some positives have been that men have been able to access the programme who would not have otherwise been able to due to work commitments / travel time etc, with one man maintaining engagement even when overseas.

Evidence of Impact

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS) has been fully operational for over five years and over 5,000 women have been referred to the service. No-one referred to DAIS has been killed as a result of domestic abuse. No perpetrator referred to DAIS has killed anyone.

Hackney Young Futures Commission (2,400 young people aged DAIS clients give positive feedback about DAIS. After DAIS' intervention, 76% of clients feel less likely to *"have to change what I say or do based on how [the perpetrator] might react"*. 69% report

feeling less worried about being hurt again. 88% reported that DAIS had considered well any issues relating to their identity.

In terms of partner agency feedback on training provided by DAIS, 97.5% describe it positively with 72.5% describing training as *'very useful'* with 97% reporting that their practice will be improved as a result of the training. 97% found DAIS to be an accessible service. 97% said if they had a friend or relative being hurt by someone they loved, they would recommend DAIS to them.



Identifying and responding to children's needs and appropriate thresholds

Front Door Review and development of MASH

In February 2020 a review of Hackney's children's social care 'front door', the First Access and Screening Team (FAST) began. The review was initiated as the 'front door' of children's services had seen a steadily increasing level of contact, referral and assessment rates, particularly when compared to comparator boroughs, and in turn a higher proportion of social work assessments that ended in no further action. Quality assurance activity also demonstrated some confusion over the application of thresholds amongst partner agencies, the seeking of consent when making a referral to statutory social work services and an over reliance on social work assessment by partners, particularly within educational settings.

Activity on the Front Door Review accelerated in 2021, and in February 2021 FAST launched a professional consultation line for designated leads to seek advice and guidance. The Hackney Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was launched from 1st July 2021, bringing Hackney in line with other authorities across London. The development of the MASH is focused on better informed multi-agency decision making so that

children and families get the right service at the right time, with a joint mission across the partnership to reinforce the respectful and consistent application of seeking consent from children and families, and a focus on proportionate assessment with a clear commitment and emphasis on clear and streamlined pathways to services. The MASH now includes an Education representative as well as an Early Help hub.

Our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub operates as a single point of contact for members of the public and professionals who are seeking advice and information, and/or who want to make a request for support for a child or young person in Hackney who may be in need of help or protection. A multi-agency Daily Risk Meeting was implemented in early October 2021. This meeting is well attended by agency colleagues including Adult Services, Probation, Police, Health and Housing. Our work on consent / reinforcing partnership responsibility and the consultation line is also impacting on improving the quality and reducing the volume of contacts / referrals. The ongoing development of the Early Help hub will help ensure that families are able to access the right service at the earliest possible opportunity and a consistency of approach across the Council (in terms of access to targeted Early Help support).

“The development of the MASH is focused on better informed multi-agency decision making” ...

Evidence of Impact

Consultation line

The consultation line in the MASH is working well, with 423 calls to the line since it launched in February 2021 to 8th December 2021. 30 audits were undertaken over July-October 2021 and found that overall, appropriate advice and guidance was provided, with referrers directed to early help/other resources as appropriate or given clear advice about how to make an effective referral; the use of the consultation line has resulted in no need for a referral to be made in 57% of cases reviewed; and the use of the consultation line is embedding well within the service and the wider partnership. A City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership internal

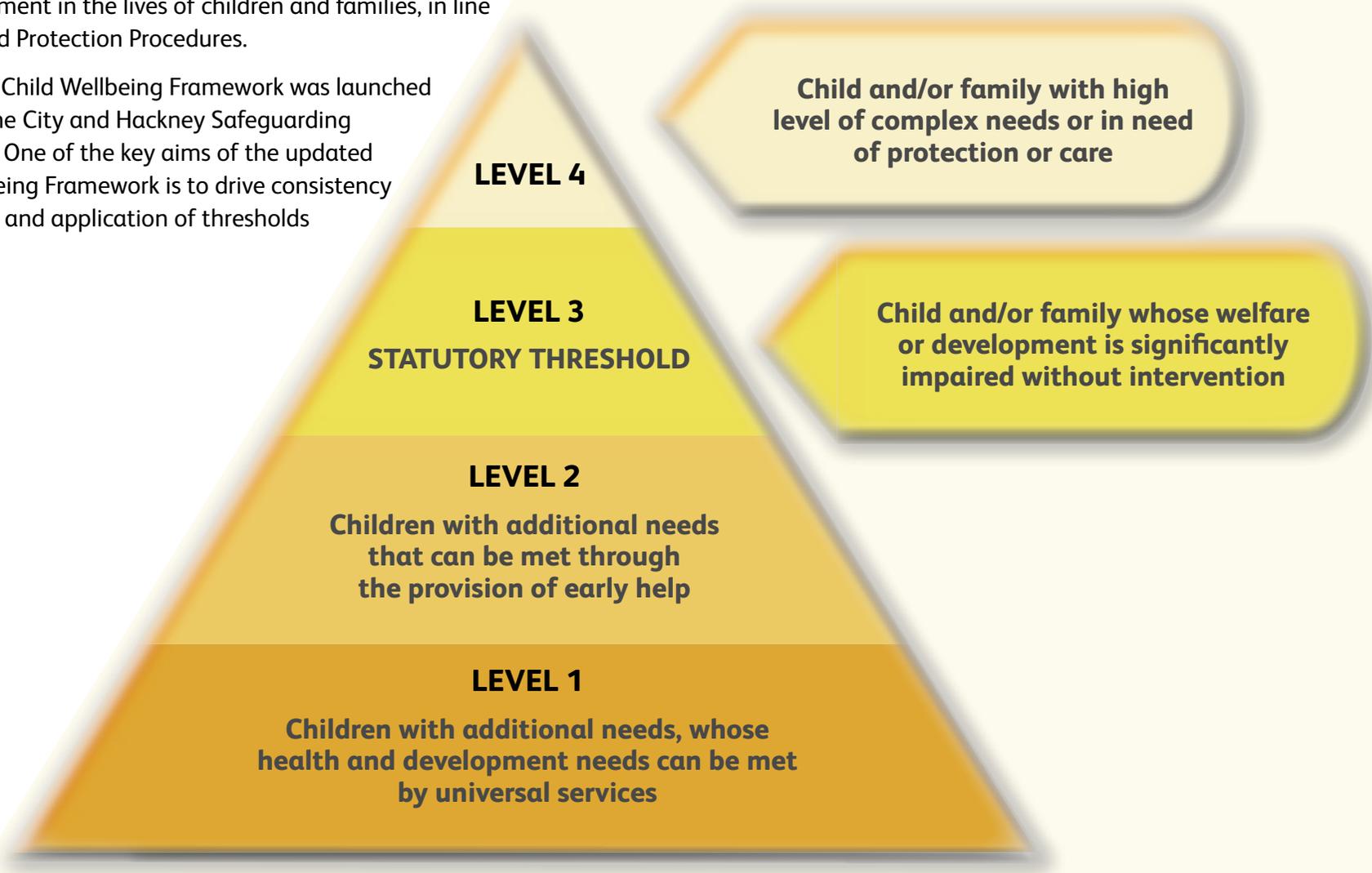
and external audit of the quality of referrals in September 2021 clearly evidenced that the consultation line improved the quality of referrals. The audits identified that there is still more work to be done with referrers particularly around consent, and referrers providing details of support networks including fathers and extended family members at the point of referral. Similar findings were found by the external auditor commissioned by the partnership in Autumn 2021. The City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership is leading on progressing improvement work with partner agencies about the quality of referrals based on these audit findings.



Revised Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework

As part of our review of the 'front door' function the Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework has now been revised to reflect the four levels of multi-agency involvement in the lives of children and families, in line with the London Child Protection Procedures.

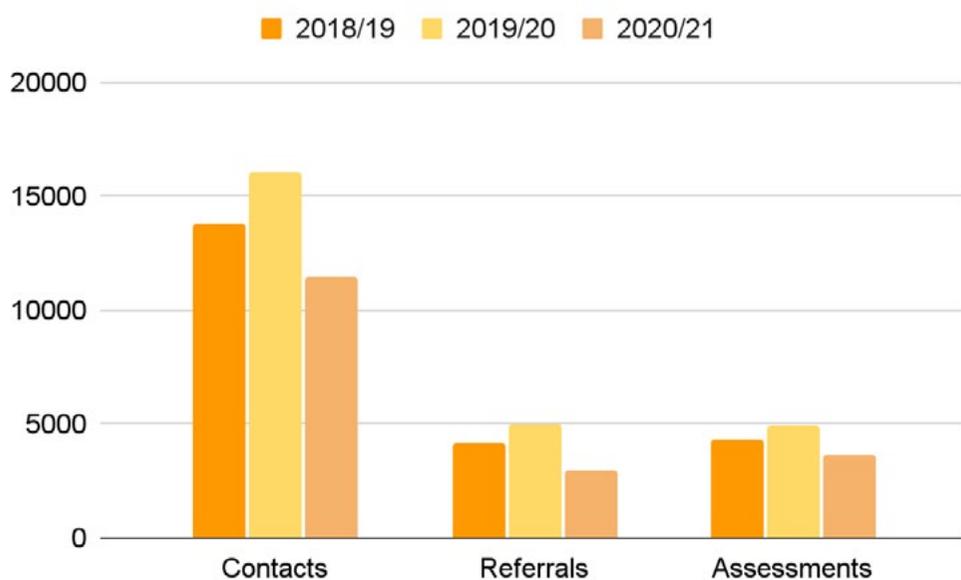
The revised Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework was launched in July 2021 led by the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership. One of the key aims of the updated Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework is to drive consistency in the understanding and application of thresholds with partners.



Contacts, referrals and assessments

Contacts, referrals and assessments all reduced in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20. There was a 28 % decrease in the number of contacts, a 42 % decrease in the number of referrals and a 22 % decrease in the number of assessments completed.

	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Apr to Sep-21
Number of contacts	13,767	16,044	11,473	5,740

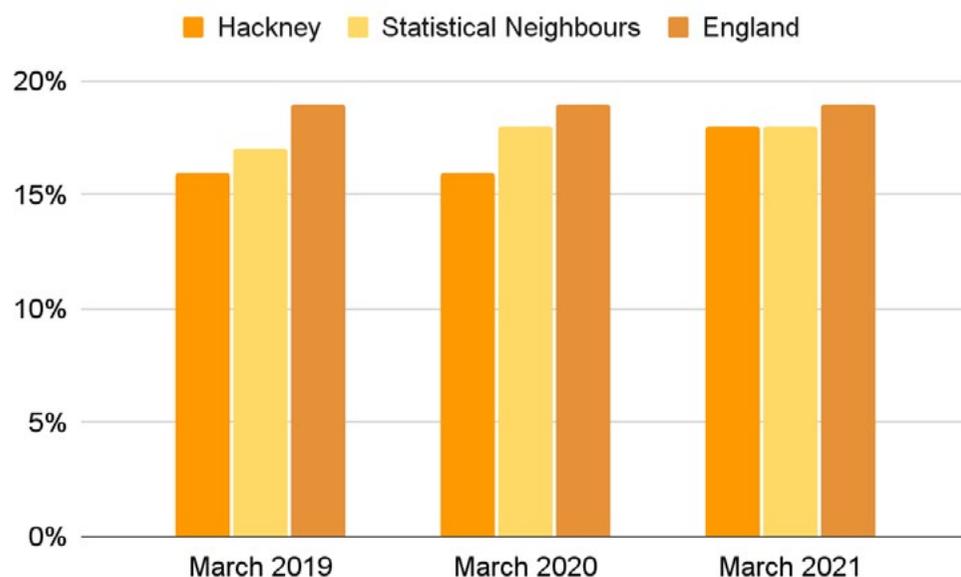


While demand for statutory children’s social care in Hackney has increased in the last 5 years, there was a 42 % decrease in referrals received in 2020/21, compared to 2019-20. This is partly linked to a decrease in referrals seen nationally during the pandemic. Hackney’s referral rate in the first half of 2021/22 (487) is far more in line with the rates seen in statistical neighbour authorities than was previously the situation in 2019/20. This is also linked to the changes driven by the Front Door Review, including improved early help pathways through the successful piloting of an embedded ‘Early Help Hub’ within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, ensuring children, young people and families are able to get the right support for them, as quickly as possible. Children in need of help and protection receive a timely response from the MASH. The most recent data shows that in October 2021, where the threshold is met for intervention, all contacts are progressed within 24 hours. An initial decision is made within 24 hours for 98 % of contacts received. Further analysis of the reduction in contacts at the front door and whether this is a result of improved partnership working or whether there are issues with the interim recording system that need to be addressed will be completed in December 2021.

	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Apr to Sep-21
Number of Referrals	4,190	5,031	2,930	1,556
Rate of Referrals per 10,000 population	658	788	459	487
Statistical neighbours	574	581	497	n/a
England	545	535	494	n/a

	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Apr to Sep-21
Percentage of cases which were re-referrals which had been open in the past 12 months	16%	16%	18%	14%
Statistical neighbours	17%	18%	18%	n/a
England	19%	19%	19%	n/a

	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Apr to Sep-21
Number of social work assessments completed	4,290	4,923	3,664	1,588
Rate of assessments per 10,000 population	674	771	604	497
Statistical neighbours	513	529	477	n/a
England	539	554	518	n/a



Hackney's re-referral rate of 18% for 2020/21 is in line with statistical neighbours (18%) and the England average (19%).

Although the number of social work assessments completed in Hackney reduced by 22% between 2019/20 and 2020/21, the rate of assessments per 10,000 in Hackney (604) was higher than both statistical neighbour (477) and England (518) averages in 2020/21. This was partly due to the very high number of assessments completed in Hackney in April and May 2020, where these referrals had come into the system in the first few months of the year and due to the volume of assessments held in the service at the time, some of these assessments took longer to complete and were completed in the first two months of 2020/21, contributing to the higher number and rate when compared with other local authorities for the same time period. The rate of assessments completed in the first half of 2021/22 (497) is higher than the 2020/21 statistical neighbour and but lower than the national average.

	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Apr to Sep-21
Percentage of social work assessments completed within 45 working days	63 %	64 %	77 %	92 %
Statistical neighbours	86 %	88 %	94 %	n/a
England	84 %	85 %	89 %	n/a

Performance on assessments completed within 45 working days improved from 64 % in 2019/20 to 77 % in 2020/21. Performance against this indicator was also affected by the high volume of assessments completed in the first two months of 2020/21 (April and May 2020) and the timeliness of these assessments. Performance against this indicator was significantly better in the remaining months of 2020/21. 92 % of assessments were completed within 45 working days during April - September 2021, which is just below the statistical neighbour average of 94 % and better than the England average of 89 %.

Evidence of Impact

Routine audits are undertaken on the quality of Child and Family Assessments. 52 audits from March - November 2021 show that practice is not consistently good, with 60% rated as good or outstanding, and 40% rated as requires improvement or inadequate; however, recent audits show stronger performance.

Strengths included timely, well-informed assessments, engaging fathers and evidencing the voice of the child. Areas for improvement included recording issues and the evidence of management oversight needing to be clearer on the child's case file.

Listening Together Pilot

As a service, we are committed to offering families the best opportunities to support their children at times of need. However, we have found that many of the children who are being referred to us do not require the kind of statutory, long term, intensive support that our social workers provide. Families have told us that our first involvement in their private lives can at times feel intrusive, frightening and be a stressful experience. Our anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches to working with families means that we need to find ways of listening to families experiences and develop authentic, family-based, and inclusive ways of stepping into families' lives once a referral is made to us.

As a result, the service is piloting the Listening Together project from

November 2021. This is aimed at offering families who have a child referred into the Access and Assessment Service, a more respectful, transparent and collaborative response. A Listening Together meeting will be offered to a small number of families as an alternative to 'assessment as usual'. If the family agrees, they will be asked to invite any supportive person in their network to attend the Listening Together meeting with them. The social worker will then invite the family's professional network to attend the same meeting. This meeting will take place within 10 days of the initial visit to the family. By the end of the meeting, there will be a plan that the family and everyone present has created. This written record will then form part of the social work assessment and will be sent to all those in attendance. The pilot will be evaluated by the What Works Centre to ensure that we are open to learning from families and professionals as the pilot proceeds.

Local Area Designated Officer

Organisations where employees and volunteers work with children (including foster carers and prospective adopters) are required to have clear and accessible policies and procedures to manage occasions when allegations are made against staff or volunteers. As part of that, organisations have to appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead to whom the allegations are reported, who would then report it to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has the responsibility to manage and have oversight of allegations.

The LADO service received 174 contacts during the period of 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 which is a decrease of 135 (44 %) on the previous year

(309 contacts). This is linked to the Covid-19 pandemic where the country had two lockdowns that included school closures, with the exception of access to key worker children; schools and nurseries are the dominant employment groups that generate referrals to the LADO service. The decrease for the Hackney LADO service is in line with a similar trend across LADO services in London as shared at the London LADO network meeting as well as in peer supervision.

The occupations with the highest number of contacts were school support staff (23 %), teachers (22 %) and nursery workers (11 %). This is consistent with previous years and is likely attributable to the higher ratio of children to staff given schools and day care provisions have higher numbers of children accessing services compared with health or leisure facilities for example.

Evidence of Impact

Practice audits of LADO work are conducted every 6 months by the Service Manager and Practice Development Managers in the Safeguarding and Reviewing Team. The most recent audit in September 2021 looked at 27 LADO cases. These consistently find timely responses from the LADO service, positive working relationships between the LADO and partner agencies, clear actions and outcomes being achieved. What routinely remains

problematic is a lack of written referrals/information being received from referrers, and partners not providing updates of feedback from their internal investigations as requested by the LADO. This results in additional work for the LADO in terms of having to outline phone conversations in emails so that the network is clear on advice provided and actions expected, and requesting updates.



Making good decisions and providing effective help

Strategy Discussions

A multi-agency practice protocol on Strategy Discussions was completed in November 2020, shared and agreed upon by all partner agencies. Training and video guidance for practitioners on strategy discussions is published on the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership website. Working agreements are in place with the police to set out pathways for engaging officers in Strategy Discussions from different sections of the Police in accordance with the type of harm that a child may be exposed to. The

Metropolitan Police have agreed to hold Strategy Discussion / Missing Child Meetings within 24 hours rather than within 72 hours for children at highest risk of harm when children are missing.

1,077 strategy discussions were held in 2020/21, a 34% decrease compared to 1,633 strategy discussions held in 2019/20. This corresponds to the decrease in referrals about children and families over the same period.

Evidence of Impact

A multi-agency Strategy Discussion audit of 15 strategy discussions was led by the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership in July 2021 and has complemented the activity in this area undertaken to date by Hackney Children and Families Service. 22 organisations participated in this audit, including 8 GP Practices and 8 Schools. 100% of Strategy Discussions audited included the Police; 66.7% were attended by Health colleagues. Auditors were also asked to comment on attendance by Education (60% attendance), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Adult Services (both 7% attendance) at strategy discussions. For all children, decisions were made to effectively respond to the safeguarding needs. Strengths in practice included: there was high confidence that the decisions and actions made at the strategy discussion made children safer;

agencies sharing sufficient information to confidently inform decision making and action planning; and the significant majority of strategy discussions evidenced relevant information sharing about significant others within the family and were clear on the next steps and action planning. Strategy discussions were clear on the steps and timescales for immediate and short-term support for the child. Areas for improvement included: consistent use by all agencies of the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Guidance and Agenda Template to guide strategy discussions; the Children and Families Service to amend its interim recording template for strategy discussions to match the headings set out in the partnership agenda template; and improvement in the circulation of formal minutes of strategy discussions. The Partnership also understands the need to improve the engagement

of ELFT at strategy discussions by ensuring ELFT practitioners involved with families (both adults and children) are identified and invited. This improvement will be supported via the introduction of an ELFT role within the new Hackney MASH model.

This audit noted that the quantity of research that can be carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service on all concerned individuals is limited by the time constraints of strategy discussion notification and Police capacity to undertake these checks in full. That said, the Police have confirmed that all relevant parties are scanned, and a fast-time snapshot of information is compiled to allow for the

risk management discussion. The Police audit lead assessed that there was sufficient information shared to enable good discussion and informed decision making around risk management. The partnership audit identified no disparities between information shared at the Initial Child Protection Conference not being shared at the strategy discussion affecting the immediate safety of the child(ren). A further external audit of strategy discussions is being commissioned by the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership and is scheduled for January - February 2022 to further review progress in this area.

Children supported on Child in Need Plans

	Jan 2021	July 2021	Sep 2021
Snapshot of children supported on Child in Need Plans (within the Children in Need Service)	865	699	619

There has been a decrease in the number of children supported on Child in Need Plans, which is linked to increased oversight by managers to ensure that children are on the correct plan according to thresholds, as well as a corresponding drop in referrals and assessments over the same period.

Evidence of Impact

Audits of support for children on Child in Need Plans take place on a regular basis. 23 audits from April - November 2021 show that practice requires improvement, with audits from July 2021 onwards showing an improvement in audit scores. The audits showed that 66% of visits were held in accordance with Practice Standards, 63% of plans were goal-focused and outcome-oriented; 66% included fathers / male carers, only 25% included explicit consideration of Family Group Conferences and 20% included the wider family network. In order to strengthen the recording of Child

in Need visits, a template for visit records has been introduced. Files were audited before and after the template was introduced in October 2021 and show that Child In Need visit recording has improved from requires improvement to good since the introduction of the visit recording template. During the focused visit, Ofsted noted that *“most children are on a child in need or child protection plan when this is needed. Decisions to step cases up or down are mostly appropriate in response to changes in risk”*.

Children supported through Child Protection Plans

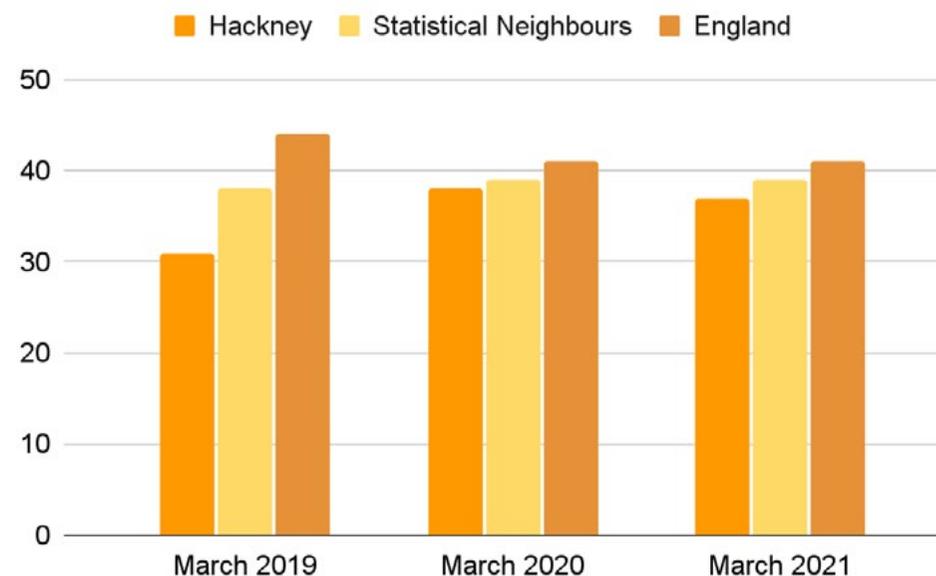
The number and rate of children supported on Child Protection Plans decreased over the course of 2020/21 following increased management oversight and this decrease has continued with 197 children supported on a Child Protection Plan as at the end of September 2021 (a rate of 31 per 10,000 as at September 2021).

Number of children supported on Child Protection Plans

March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	Sept 2021
194	251	237	197

Children supported on Child Protection Plans per 10,000 population aged under 18

	March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	Sept 2021
Hackney	31	38	37	31
Statistical Neighbour	38	39	39	n/a
England	44	41	41	n/a



This decrease is mostly accounted for by the decrease in Initial Child Protection Conferences with 312 held in 2020/21 compared to 432 in 2019/20. This trend has continued into 2021/21, with 131 Initial Child Protection Conferences held between April-September 2021. The duty consultation process between our Safeguarding and Reviewing Team (Child Protection Chairs) and the social work units has better supported appropriate threshold decisions for children.

Duration of closed Child Protection Plan (percentage)

	March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	Sept 2021
Under 3 months	27 %	24 %	34 %	34 %
3 - 6 months	30 %	17 %	31 %	17 %
6 - 12 months	24 %	40 %	32 %	33 %
1 - 2 years	13 %	16 %	20 %	16 %
2+ years	6 %	3 %	3 %	1 %

The percentage of Child Protection Plans closing at 3 months increased from March 2020 to March 2021. As a result of this, an audit in March 2021 was undertaken for Child Protection Plans ending after 3 months. This audit found that we had been overly risk averse and the child's lived experience needed to be better understood at the Child in Need stage. As a result we have strengthened the consultation process in the Safeguarding and Reviewing Team for all children. There has also been a move to listen to how young people feel they would be best supported, looking at individual needs of each sibling based on their age, functioning, and specific needs. A Practice Development Manager from the Safeguarding and Reviewing Team now

attends strategy meetings to ensure there is independent review and that all options have been considered, for example whether to consider a Child in Need Plan and then step up at three months if no progress has been made. We are continuing to closely monitor this area.

The percentage of children supported on Child Protection Plans for 2 years or longer has decreased from 3 % in March 2020 to 1 % in September 2021. All children who have had a Child Protection Plan for more than 2 years have had a parallel process for either Public Law Outline pre-proceedings or care proceedings underway.

We cannot currently report on the number or percentage of children who became subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time due to the impact of the cyberattack in October 2020 on our recording systems. We are working on reviewing historic data to be able to report on this performance indicator.

A Child Protection Impact and Tracking Meeting is held every 6 weeks consisting of Service Managers and Heads of Service which systematically reviews Child Protection Plans that have been open 9-12 months, 13-15 months, 16 months+, repeat plans, and plans ending at the first review, to ensure appropriate application of thresholds.

Evidence of Impact

The most recent meeting in November 2021 reviewed 13 audits of children supported on Child Protection Plans, and found that practice requires improvement. Auditors found that the actions in children's plans clearly link to achieving the goal and improving the experience of the child; that timescales are generally clear and proportionate; and that generally the Chair's oversight was evident on the file, with clear contingency planning in place. Auditors also found that the written quality of plans could be improved,

including ensuring that issues of identity have been considered fully, with an appropriate number of goals included in the plan.

In April 2021, City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook a multi-agency audit of Child Protection Conferences. Auditors found that partner agency attendance and report timescales for Child Protection Conferences needs to improve. Recommendations as a result of this included for City and Hackney

Safeguarding Children Partnership to produce an animated video setting out expectations for professionals invited to Child Protection Conferences; to host anonymised examples of model Child Protection reports on the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership website; and to review the availability of multi-agency guidance on sharing child protection reports with families. Recommendations for the Children and Families Service included

revising the guidance and templates to provide greater clarity about the expected content from agencies in Child Protection reports, particularly for those that do not regularly attend Child Protection Conferences. Partner agency recommendations included promotion and monitoring report submissions and timescales, including planning audits to check the quality of reports and adherence to timescales for reports.

Child Protection Plans - visits and seeing children alone

94 % of children on Child Protection Plans were visited within 20 working days between 18 October - 14 November 2021. 68 % of children supported on a Child Protection Plan had a recorded visit within 10 working days as at 10th November 2021 in line with Practice Standards, with a further 17 % having a recorded visit within the last 20 working days. We introduced a new visit form in August 2021 in our interim recording system to more accurately track whether children were seen alone when they were visited. In successful

visits, we can see that for 84 % of visits to children on a Child Protection Plan, children were seen during the visit (as at 10 November 2021) and that in 46 % of instances where children were seen, they were seen alone during the visit. We know that this needs to be improved and understand that this is likely to relate to recording issues - we are working on this to ensure visits and children seen alone are recorded accurately and in a timely manner. Our practice standards make very clear how important it is that children are seen and spoken to alone wherever practicable, and where this does not happen, the rationale for this must be recorded on the child's file.



Public Law Outline (PLO) and court proceedings

Practice guidance for all staff on the application of good practice in Public Law Outline (PLO) was issued in February 2020. The aim of this guidance is to achieve confidence and competence in our staff when managing such complex work. Sitting alongside this practice guidance is our protocol

between children's social care and the Council's Legal Service, developed in February 2021. This protocol has enabled us to ensure greater consistency in legal representation within PLO and care proceedings. With a focus on the definition of roles, obligations and escalation policies and detailed agreed timescales we have a robust approach to ensuring we are clear on how we protect and safeguard children together. The Family Justice Board guidance from March 2021 is currently being embedded into the PLO process in Hackney.

Evidence of Impact

8 audits on our PLO work were undertaken in March 2021 and found that practice required improvement, with limited records available due to the cyberattack meaning that not all the evidence to show the progress within timescales was on the child's file, although the audit found that PLO minutes on file were of a good quality. There was also good evidence through the PLO process that all options for the child's future care - within and outside of the family network - were openly being discussed with parents and being proactively explored. Since April 2021 we have had a dedicated Service Manager tracking and monitoring the quality and progress of plans for children who enter into PLO.

During the Ofsted focused visit in July 2021, inspectors found: *"for children involved in the Public Law Outline (PLO) and pre-proceedings work, decision-making is usually prompt and consistent. A timely response and effective tracking by managers help families to engage in this process and ensure that delay is avoided. When children's circumstances are not improving through child protection planning, the PLO and pre-proceedings work are applied effectively to reduce risk, averting the need for proceedings in some cases. For a small number of children, earlier application of the PLO could have been considered."* The visit highlighted that for some children on Child Protection Plans, escalation to PLO could happen sooner.

At the Children's Resource Panel, out of the 58 referrals made between June and November 2021, 39 of which have been for consideration of initiation of PLO or Care Proceedings, there have been 8 children in 7 families for whom it was identified that escalation to PLO could have taken place sooner. One was an unborn child for whom it would have been helpful to initiate specialist assessments prior to birth, one was a child living in a mother and baby mental health unit. 6 children in 5 families were in relation to the child

living in circumstances of neglect with fluctuating changes in parenting capacity, all of whom were supported through Child Protection Plans. This theme was shared with Service Managers, Practice Development Managers and Consultant Social Workers in our Driving Quality and Improvement in Performance meeting in November 2021 to raise awareness of the thematic issues arising and improvements required.

Service Managers review the progress of Child Protection Plans at 9 months and Child in Need Plans at 9 and 15 months, to consider whether escalation could possibly occur at an earlier stage. This is also mirrored in scrutiny of PLO pre-proceedings progress by the Head of Service. Service Managers will be reviewing progress via audit in January 2022. The Head of Service is closely monitoring this area through monthly court tracker meetings. There has been an increase in the number of children in PLO since July 2021, when there were 9 children in PLO and no children waiting to start PLO. At the first week of December 2021, 14 children were in PLO.

The number and rate of care applications decreased in 2020/21 and was higher than the national rate of care applications.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Hackney number of care applications	66	107	75
Hackney care applications per 10,000 child population	10.3	16.4	11.4
England care applications per 10,000 child population	11.3	10.8	10.5

The time taken to complete care and supervision proceedings was an average of 38 weeks in Hackney in 2020/21, compared to a national average of 41 weeks. This is an increase for Hackney from 32 weeks in 2019-20, and the national average of 32 weeks in 2019/20. This has increased nationally since April 2020 due to the pressures on the court system as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown. The national average target for the length of court proceedings is 26 weeks.



Clinical Support

Clinical Service

Over the past ten months we have undertaken a process of resetting our Clinical Service in line with the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted in 2019. This has been specifically to: remove avoidable drift and delay; improve the timeliness and effectiveness of pre-proceedings work; inform the assessment of children living in neglectful environments; and support the safeguarding of children who are missing education or who are home educated. The service aims to integrate a mental health and wellbeing offer across the Children and Families Service as we know that children and young people who access children’s social care are at greater risk of mental health difficulties. By moving to a ‘stepped care’ clinical model the service is able to work with a broad range of children and families from early intervention, as well as for our most vulnerable children and young people in care or on the edge of family breakdown, in a responsive, targeted offer. The Clinical Service offers both a direct and indirect offer:

- Indirect Clinical Offer: This is open to all families and individuals open to the Children and Families Service. The main part of this offer is consultation, but also includes training, supervision and court work. Clinicians complete assessments for court proceedings as part of the Public Law Outline. These range from assessments with parents, individual children or family groups, making use of specialist assessment tools and approaches as applicable.
- Direct Clinical Offer: This is only available to children and families in the Children and Families Service with an allocated social worker, or open to the Youth Offending Team. This includes those in receipt of a Child in Need plan, a Child Protection Plan or Children in Care.

During 2020/21, the Clinical Service received 435 referrals. This is a decrease

from 476 referrals received during 2019/20 but covers the pandemic period. Demand has increased since then and between April - September 2021, the Clinical Service received 609 referrals and the Service was working with a total of 662 children/families during that period.

Children with acute mental health/complex needs

Like many local areas, Hackney has experienced a significant increase in referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) which includes an increase in acute presentations on the cusp of, or at Tier 4 level, with a shortage of beds in adolescent mental health in patient facilities leading to challenges in identification of suitable care arrangements for a small number of children. Planning meetings for these children have engaged senior leaders and Directors where required in order to agree upon an effective plan of intervention and care arrangements. Concerns about the challenges expressed by both Children's Social Care and CAMHS were

escalated to City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership. Work is currently taking place to develop a revised joint protocol in the context of the current challenges and to explore opportunities to commission new joint funded care arrangements.

The pandemic has impacted activity and created a surge in CAMHS activity, coupled with an increase in the complexity of presentations. This is applicable across all services but specific areas, such as eating disorders and crisis, have seen larger demand, as demonstrated by the increased level of referrals seen across City and Hackney services. Throughout the pandemic local need has been continually monitored through the CAMHS Alliance Board and additional contingency planning meetings with providers to ensure that service delivery is responsive to local need and mitigations are put in place where necessary. A number of local system adaptations have been made as a result, with accelerated rollout of digital solutions to widen availability of treatment options for young people.

“Like many local areas, Hackney has experienced a significant increase in referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.”





Participation and direct work with children and families

Hackney Youth Parliament

Hackney Youth Parliament delivered weekly online sessions during the Covid-19 lockdowns. During this time, Hackney Youth Parliament have delivered workshops on debating, Black history, the Orthodox Jewish community, and undertaken applications and interviews of all those wishing to be on the ballot as they recruited new members. Over 40 young people were interested in taking part in our new forums and 15 young people put themselves forward to go on the election ballot through the online election process that attracted 2,500 young people to vote. 6 of these young people were elected in June 2021 and form the core of Hackney Youth Parliament and are the leaders of the three new forums. Over the next 2 years, each forum will focus on issues pledged in their manifestos. This includes Life after Covid, policing, mental health in schools, and all forums will undertake work in promoting opportunities to increase work experience and life skills training. Hackney Youth Parliament now meets twice weekly and has over 35 young people taking part. Hackney Youth Parliament has also elected 2 representatives to the London Youth Assembly and the British Youth Council. Hackney Youth Parliament have attended the Hackney Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission, and have presented their manifestos at a full cabinet meeting with the Mayor. They have also met with Hackney Council's new Chief Executive and have made progress by ensuring Hackney reviews its work experience offer to young people with a view to expanding this in the future to create more opportunities.

Children's Rights Service

Hackney's Children's Rights Service provides a range of support to children and young people who are supported by, or have been supported by, Hackney Children's Social Care, with priority given to children who are looked after, leaving care or supported on Child Protection Plans. The team provides an independent service that helps young people have their voice heard through advocacy; represents children's wishes and feelings; and provides information to children and young people about their rights and entitlements.

The team also offers an Independent Return Home Interview service to young people who have been reported missing by their parents or carers. This provides a safe space to allow young people to talk in confidence about their experiences and to create safety plans. During 2019/20 there were 821 recorded missing episodes, in relation to 108 children and young people. Due to the cyber attack, full year data for 2020/21 is not available; however, during October 2020 - March 2021 there were 259 missing episodes recorded on the interim recording system. If this were doubled to give a 12 month picture it would be substantially lower than the number of missing episodes recorded the previous year. However, lockdown restrictions did impact on the number of children going missing, with a lower number of children going missing fewer times, as there were fewer activities to open to go to and more scrutiny of people spending time outside.

During October 2020 - March 2021 there were 59 Return Home Interviews submitted on the interim recording system, which translates to Independent

Return Home Interviews being undertaken in 23 % of missing episodes, in relation to 34 young people. This is a smaller percentage of Independent Return Home Interviews being accepted than last year, but more individual children having an Independent Return Home Interview completed.

As this data has not been cleansed and does not represent the full 12 month period, there are a number of caveats around how accurate this is and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. However, Children's Rights Officers continue to attend the daily discussion with Hackney Missing Police to actively follow up with children who are or have been missing in the Borough. The Children's Rights Service is also copied into all Emergency Duty Team alerts for missing children who are living outside of Hackney so proactive follow-up can take place with social workers regarding the offer of the Independent Return Home Interview. We know that social workers or care workers may complete Return Home Interviews but at times this information is captured in visit case records rather than the Return Home Interview record on our interim system, so this will not show in our reporting. Even when children decline a Return Home Interview, efforts are always

made by those working with them to discuss any missing episode and try and resolve any issues which may be contributing to a young person going missing. All Children's Social Care staff are now attending the mandatory Safety Planning training which is taking place each month facilitated by the Children's Rights Service and Context Intervention Unit to increase skills around safety planning with young people even if this is outside of a specific Return Home Interview.

Since April 2020 the Children's Rights Service has offered advocacy to all children aged 5 and over who are supported through a Child Protection Plan. The team has developed additional resources for practitioners in terms of focusing discussions with children to obtain their views. The service facilitated two workshops with Consultant Social Workers and Practice Development Managers in July and September 2021 focussing on evidencing the voice of the child so these managers can quality assure Child Protection reports more thoroughly. 134 children have been referred to the Children's Rights Service for Child Protection during the year, representing 49 % of all referrals.

Evidence of Impact

Audits of Children's Rights Officer work are regularly undertaken, with 11 audits undertaken in February 2021 and audits currently underway in December 2021. The audits clearly demonstrate the quality of the relationship between the young people and their Children's Rights Officer, with Children's Rights Officers being able to provide positive and constructive feedback to young people when their requests or expectations are unrealistic or unsafe. The audits highlight excellent examples of advocacy and clearly evidencing and supporting young people to contribute their views, experiences and hopes for their future,

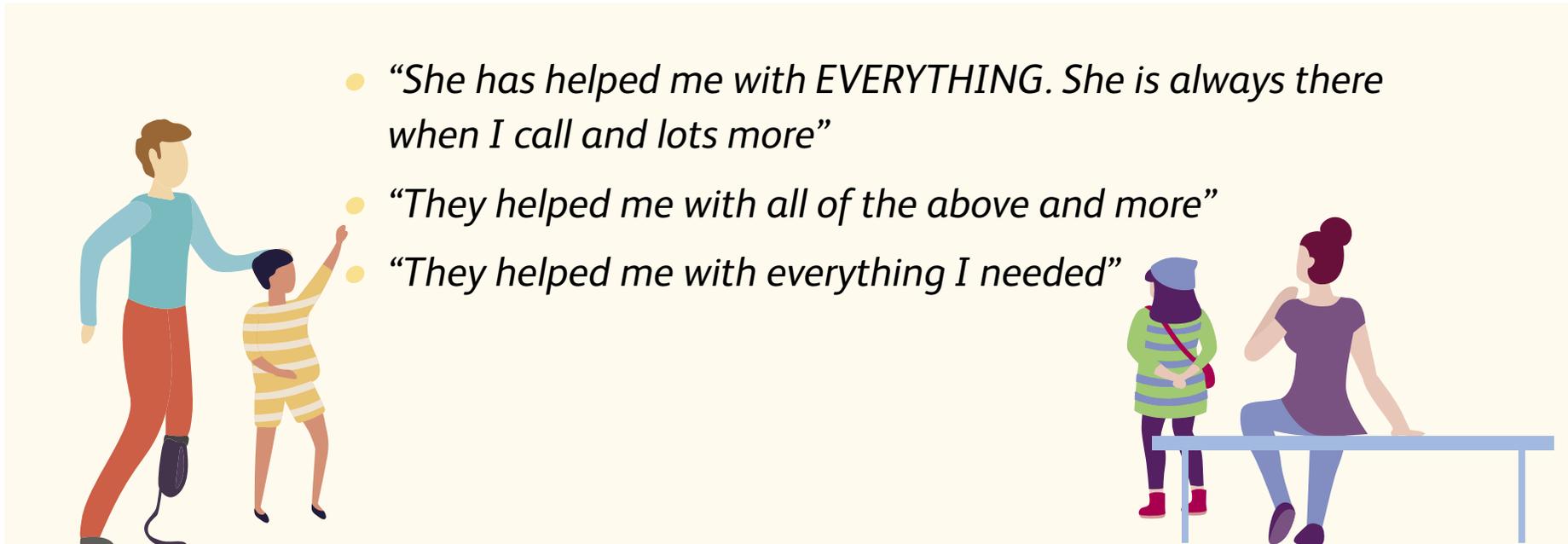
which was meaningful to decision making and planning. Where audits were not graded as highly this was due to a lack of recording and evidence of the relationship building that had gone into creating the advocacy relationship. Given difficulties relating to the cyberattack and changes in staffing within the team, increasing consistency around recording remains an area for development for the service.

Feedback gathered about how young people felt about their working relationships with their Children's Rights Officers and the outcomes achieved is universally positive and encouraging that

young people unanimously felt listened to and treated equally and fairly by their Children's Rights Officers. Young people made the following comments about the Children's Rights Service:

- "She has helped me with EVERYTHING. She is always there when I call and lots more"

- "They helped me with all of the above and more"
- "They helped me with everything I needed"





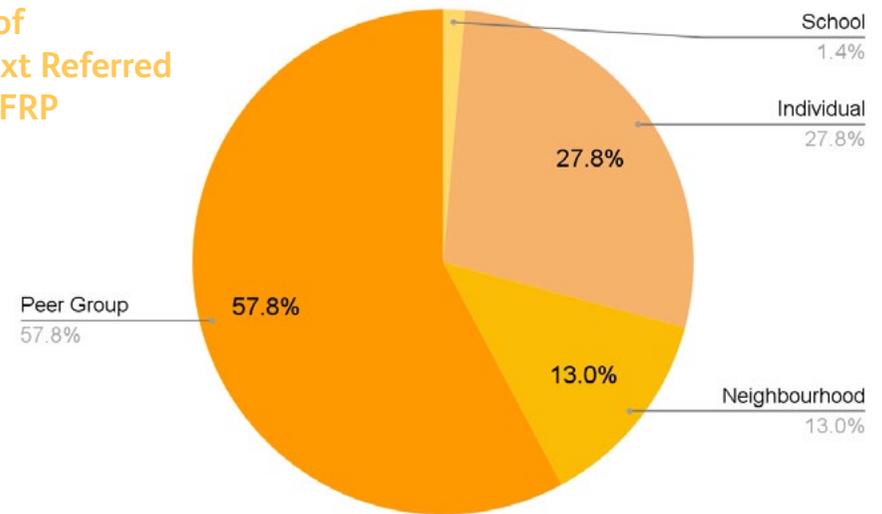
Identifying and responding to all types of abuse recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children

Context Intervention Unit

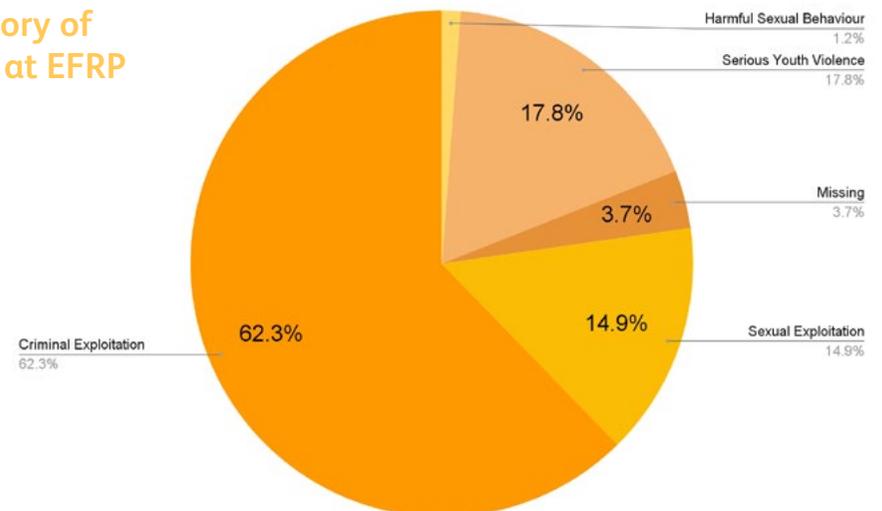
The Department for Education provided funding from October 2020 to September 2021 to take forward the embedding of contextual safeguarding in Hackney. This has enabled the formation of a unit to drive the implementation and embedding of Contextual Safeguarding in Hackney through undertaking and modelling assessments and interventions of 'contexts of concern' (e.g. peer groups, schools, locations) in partnership with statutory and non-statutory partners, developing practice and confidence within the Children and Families Service and across partner agencies and undertaking an evaluation of the impact of contextual safeguarding on practice. The Context Intervention Unit moved to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in the Family Intervention and Support Service in September 2021. An external evaluation of the Contextual Intervention Unit is being undertaken by the University of Sussex, who will report on findings in September 2022.

Hackney's Extra Familial Risk Panel (EFRP) facilitates partnership safeguarding interventions where a child or young person - or a group of children / young people - are harming or being harmed by others. The Panel considers in particular contexts of concern (peer group, school, neighbourhood/location). Partners find that EFRP supports agencies to better understand what is happening for the young people they are working with, supports healthy challenge between agencies and has led to improved system approaches to safeguarding individuals and contexts, for example the EFRP process prompting police opening up new lines of enquiry or to identify previously 'unseen' young people as being at risk. Discussions have also highlighted areas agencies can strengthen to improve their service delivery to all children. A total of 87 'cases' have been discussed at EFRP, representing 204 young people and 5 locations between October 2020 and August 2021.

Type of Context Referred into EFRP



Category of Harm at EFRP



The most common type of harm referred into EFRP is criminal exploitation, followed by serious youth violence and criminal exploitation. There can be multiple types of harm recorded for one young person. The most common combination of harm is criminal exploitation and serious youth violence.

Neglect

Following the feedback from Ofsted during our 2019 ILACS inspection that a small number of children on Child Protection Plans were experiencing neglectful circumstances for too long, we have undertaken much work to strengthen our management oversight and decision-making for these children. We audited children who had been open to services for more than 12 months in April 2020 and found that practice required improvement. In July 2020 we undertook a Practice Week on the impact of neglect, engaging staff in a series of seminars and workshops. This included learning from research and a range of practice tools. While the experience itself was positive, staff were unable to evidence the difference they make to children in such circumstances. In February-March 2022 we will begin to 'train the trainer' on the NSPCC Graded Care Profile II via City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership and roll out the Graded Care Profile Tool across all partner agencies in Hackney to avoid drift and delay for these highly vulnerable children and families, and more clearly evidence neglect. A subsequent full Live Learning Audit of children in possible neglectful circumstances is currently underway in November-December 2021 which will also support our understanding of current practice and any additional barriers presented by Covid-19 and the cyber attack for these vulnerable children.



Disabled Children's Service

We continue to focus on driving improvements in the Disabled Children's Service through a strategic action plan.

All new referrals for an assessment from the service are made through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and all children of school age should have an Education, Health and Care Plan in place.

At the end of March 2021, the service was working with 374 children and young people. Of these, 258 were male and 116 were female. This is a 7% decrease compared to 2019/20, when the service was working with 402 children and young people.

Age breakdown of children open to Disabled Children's Service

Age	Number of Children
5 or under	42
6 - 8	76
9 - 11	87
12 - 14	79
15+	90
Total	374

The Disabled Children's Service worked hard during the Covid lockdown periods to be responsive to the needs of disabled children and their families. Many young people's education was disrupted which impacted on their

routines and stability. There were also heightened concerns about children’s health needs. Initially there were concerns about maintaining existing support packages but these continued where families were happy for them to do so (some families did not want the risk of carers entering the home). The service maintained high levels of contact with families and put in additional support where needed.

Short breaks are defined as any service or activity outside of school hours which gives the family of a disabled child or young person a break from their caring responsibilities, and gives the disabled child or young person an enjoyable experience. There are currently seven commissioned short breaks providers in Hackney, including providers offering support specifically within the Orthodox Jewish community.

	Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Mar 2021
Number of young people accessing short breaks	1,400	1,599	1,388

The decrease in the number of young people accessing short breaks is due to the Covid pandemic when services were closed during the year.

Since April 2021, children receiving care packages who are also on Child in Need Plans in relation to safeguarding concerns have transferred to the Disabled Children’s Service. This minimises transitions, provides more consistency and ensures that processes are clearer for families. Audits of the Disabled Children’s Service since April 2021 have included looking at assessments undertaken as well as plans when we have had safeguarding concerns about a child. These audits have found that practice requires improvement, with increasing confidence by staff when assessing and planning for these children following training, and clear evidence of management oversight on the file in general. Although practice is generally good, more work needs to be done to capture the voice of the child in plans which decreased the overall average audit grade.



Private Fostering

A child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than a parent, person with parental responsibility or close relative for 28 days or more is described as being privately fostered. Local authorities do not approve private foster carers, but are required to assess a private fostering arrangement to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is being safeguarded and promoted. As at 30 September 2021, nine private fostering arrangements were open to Hackney. All open privately fostered children have been known to Hackney for over a year and these arrangements have been ratified by the Care Planning Panel. All private fostering children’s records are audited regularly. The most recent audit in October 2021 found that 8 of the 9 audits were rated as ‘good’ with one rated as ‘outstanding’ and for all audits, there were no safeguarding concerns identified.

Vulnerable children in education

Highly effective joint work was undertaken across the Children and Families Service and Hackney Education within phase 1 of the Covid-19 response to vulnerable children and young people in Hackney. When schools (partially) closed due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a Covid-19 response function was created within Hackney Education to work with the First Access and Screening Team (FAST) - now the MASH - to ensure children not in school were safeguarded. This also processed referrals from school staff who had not been able to successfully contact a child while they were learning off-site and were seeking help to ascertain their safety and wellbeing. The response function was staffed on a rota basis by a group of Hackney Education managers who each had an expert understanding of the local school system and existing relationships with Hackney schools. Some children were offered

places within schools (according to the school and the Children and Families Service assessing this as appropriate) during the first lockdown period, although take up of this offer was low, as it was across much of the country, especially in London. There was an increased take up of school places in the lockdown period in January/February 2021. Education support for looked after children and their foster carers was provided by the Virtual School, and virtual activities for all children were provided by Young Hackney. When we were able to, Young Hackney safely introduced in-person activities.

In September 2020, when schools reopened to all pupils in Hackney, as they also did nationally, there was a sharp increase in parents opting to home educate their children. Concern about Covid-19 was the main reason given by parents, although some parents wanted to carry on with home education having had a positive experience during the first lockdown. To ensure that children did not unnecessarily lose their school place, pupils were not removed from their school's admission register until Hackney Education had made contact with their parents. This enabled intent to be confirmed and any misconceptions to be addressed, which meant some children remained in school education settings. The sharp increase in the number of children being home educated put pressure on our suitability assessment timescales. To ensure children were safeguarded, other Hackney Education officers were tasked with carrying out well-being home visits ahead of the suitability assessment. These visits led to some children returning to school education settings.

Children missing education

There were 586 children missing education as at 31 March 2021. This is a decrease from 648 children missing education at the end of March 2020. Nationally, a number of parents withdrew children from education settings in response to anxiety about the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Locally in Hackney, the majority of children missing education are from the Orthodox Jewish community, with these children attending unregistered educational settings. As at September 2021, of 613 children missing education, 571 children were from the Orthodox Jewish community. Over the last 18 months a rapid improvement plan in relation to children missing education was developed and implemented. Key developments included:

- The development of a structure for a bi-annual teaching and a learning forum to support parents in securing positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Development and adoption of a protocol to set out our approach to engender improved relationships with the Orthodox Jewish community to establish whether or not children and young people are electively home educated.
- Launch of updated Elective Home Education policy with schools in July 2020. Public campaign (November 2020) - includes settings within the Orthodox Jewish community.
- Redesign of Elective Home Education assessment framework in accordance with statutory guidance.
- A cross service / multi agency protocol to unregistered settings, has been live since the start of September 2020.



The Experiences and Progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

We ensured that children, young people and their carers were supported through the challenges of the pandemic, particularly in regards to their education and participation. Our changes to decision-making panels for children at the edge of care and in care are starting to ensure that only those who cannot safely live at home are coming into care and we hope to strengthen our work for our adolescents on the edge of care further over the coming year. Children in care arrangements are experiencing

greater stability. We have work to do to overcome the challenges we faced in securing health checks for our children during the pandemic and are focusing on ensuring we provide good transitions for our care leavers, with improvement in pathway plan completion rates a key area of focus. There is good work taking place across the service but our focus is on ensuring consistently high standards of practice for all of our children.



We ensured that children, young people and their carers were supported through the challenges of the pandemic...





Making good decisions for children

Information about our looked after children

411 children (64 per 10,000) were looked after at the end of September 2021 compared with 426 children (67 per 10,000) at the end of March 2021, and 432 children (68 per 10,000) at the end of March 2020 (a 1 % decrease from March 2020 to March 2021).

There has been a significant decrease in the number of looked after children in Hackney over the last 10 months from a peak of 477 children (75 per 10,000) in November 2020, to 411 children (64 per 10,000) in September 2021. This follows a sustained increase in the number of looked after children per 10,000 during the first half of 2020/21. The September 2021 looked after children rate (64 per 10,000) is slightly higher than the 2020/21 statistical neighbour average (63 per 10,000) but is now lower than the 2020/21 national average (67 per 10,000).

Number of children in care as at 31 March

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Apr to Sep 21
Number of children in care at snapshot date	405	432	426	411
Children entering care	212	228	182	64
Children leaving care	195	208	181	106

Rate of children in care as at 31 March

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Apr to Sep 21
Rate of children in care per 10,000	64	68	67	64
Statistical neighbours	63	60	63	n/a
England	65	65	67	n/a

The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children accommodated by the local authority decreased from 45 in March 2020 to 31 children in March 2021, with 30 children in this cohort as at 30th September 2021. This number represents 7.3 % of our total cohort of looked after children at the end of September 2021, a decrease compared to 10.6 % of our total cohort at the end of March 2021.

Routine audits take place for our children in care with the Head of Service, Service Managers and Practice Development Managers all undertaking these. From June - November 2021, audits found that practice requires improvement, with generally good recording and good management oversight evident on the child's case file, with concerns about safety or wellbeing well addressed. Improvements needed to be made in terms of ensuring up-to-date reports and plans were captured on the child's case file and that visits are recorded and on the child's file within timescales.

Age breakdown of looked after children at 31 March 2021

Age	2019		2020		2021	
	England	Hackney	England	Hackney	England	Hackney
Under 1	5 %	19 (5 %)	5 %	20 (5 %)	5 %	18 (4 %)
1 - 4	13 %	26 (6 %)	14 %	35 (8 %)	14 %	47 (11 %)
5 - 9	18 %	58 (14 %)	18 %	55 (13 %)	19 %	57 (13 %)
10 -15	39 %	153 (38 %)	39 %	173 (40 %)	39 %	157 (37 %)
16 +	24 %	149 (37 %)	24 %	149 (34 %)	23 %	147 (34 %)

Age of children entering care

Age	2019		2020		2021	
	England	Hackney	England	Hackney	England	Hackney
Under 1	19 %	24 (11 %)	19 %	22(10 %)	20 %	23 (13 %)
1 - 4	18 %	22 (10 %)	17 %	28 (12 %)	18 %	19 (10 %)
5 - 9	18 %	19 (9 %)	16 %	26 (11 %)	17 %	20 (11 %)
10 -15	28 %	58 (27 %)	27 %	71 (31 %)	26 %	49 (27 %)
16 +	18 %	89 (42 %)	20 %	81 (36 %)	20 %	71 (39 %)
Total		212		229		182

There was a 21 % decrease in the number of children coming into care in 2020/21. Hackney continues to have a significantly high proportion of young people who enter care at an older age, with 39 % of young people entering care aged 16 or above, compared to the England average of 20 %.

Prior to November 2020, there had been a particular increase in the number of 15-17 year olds coming into care. Some of the increase in the number of children in care in 2020 was also due to court proceedings being delayed due to the impact of the pandemic that meant that some children remained looked after rather than progressing to other arrangements. The decrease in the number of looked after children since November 2020 is linked to a number of factors including a focus within the service on edge of care work to support young people where there is a risk of family breakdown as well as changes to the Children's Resource Panel where there is senior management oversight of decisions for children to enter care. The Panel has been refreshed to offer a higher level of respectful challenge and high support, with a focus on mobilising resources to step in to a family and reduce harm, keeping children at home where possible, enabling us to be more confident that we have the right children in our care.

The Corporate Parenting Service undertook a review of all semi-independent care arrangements for 16/17 year olds in February 2021 and all residential care arrangements in June 2021 to ensure that these were the best homes for these children and young people. As a result of this review the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting reviewed the panels where decisions are made about care planning for children to ensure that there is critical oversight by senior leaders at key points for children who are at risk of coming into care, and that there is critical quality assurance for those children and young people already in our care. This has included sharpening the focus of existing panels, and adding new panels such as our Ensuring Quality Care Panel and Temporary Approval and Unregulated Care Panel to replace our previous Care Planning Panel.

There was a decrease in the number of children leaving care, with 181 children leaving care in 2020-21 compared to 208 children in 2019-20. The destinations for children leaving care in 2020-21 were as follows:

Returned home	40	Custody	5
Special Guardianship Order	14	Other	117
Adoption	5		

The majority of children who left care at the end of March 2021 (most of those included in the 'other' category above), left as a result of turning 18 and becoming care leavers. This reflects the significant proportion of children who enter care in Hackney aged 16 or above.

Edge of care pilot

In recent years our population of children in care has risen disproportionately to many other inner London boroughs and this trend has been primarily driven by the high number of adolescents coming into our care. We have been concerned that of those children entering our care in adolescence, a significant proportion are from Black or global majority backgrounds and have suspected or diagnosed additional learning needs. Often, these children are experiencing disruption simultaneously at home and at school, as they struggle to have their needs fully understood and met in both arenas. Many have experienced a number of disrupted care

arrangements within their family networks already. In this context, finding an alternative home for them where they can feel safe, secure and settled is often a real challenge.

The overall aim of the edge of care service will be to keep more children living with their families safely, where it is possible to do so, and where it is not, ensuring those children who need to be in our care are offered this support at the right time, without delay. Whilst the service will primarily focus on reducing the number of adolescents coming into care as the result of family breakdown, we plan to develop the service over time to offer additional support for the safe step down from care for some children, and to stabilise care arrangements for others. Having reviewed what works elsewhere, alongside our current edge of care offer, our plan is for the new service to adopt a clear methodological approach of brief solution focused therapy, which sits in line with our wider systemic approach to practice. We have secured Clinical Commissioning Group funding to undertake a research evaluation of a 6 month pilot of the service, allowing us to understand its effectiveness in terms of achieving positive outcomes for our children and in order to inform ongoing development. In line with our wider organisational commitment to an anti-racist lens on our practice, an element of this research will focus on the disproportionality of Black and dual heritage boys in the Youth Justice System and how this intersects with our population of children on the edge of care. We plan to pilot this approach from late 2021 - recruitment is underway in November 2021 and the service should be fully staffed by February 2022.

Evidence of Impact

Feedback from children and young people in care

Each year we undertake a survey of our children in care and care leavers. In January - March 2021, we surveyed our looked after children. Headlines from this survey, with 19 responses, include:

- 89% said they know who their social worker is
- 79% said they understood what their social worker tells them (an increase from 70% in the last survey in 2020)
- 84% said they have someone to speak to where they live
- 100% said that they think their carer / key worker cares about them

86% of children in care aged 12 to 14 said they knew who their Independent Reviewing Officer was. This was similar for 15 to 18 year olds, at 80%. This is much higher than the last survey in 2020 where 60% and 59% of young people knew their who their Independent Reviewing Officer was respectively.

The response rate for this survey was low (19 responses were received), so work is underway in the newly-restructured Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service to better support children and young people's engagement in future surveys.

Children in care - visits and children seen alone

76 % of children in care were visited within 30 days as at 10th November 2021. In 69 % of visits where children were seen, the child was seen alone during the visit. We know that this needs to be improved and understand that this is likely to relate to recording issues - we are working on this to ensure visits and children seen alone are recorded accurately and in a timely manner.



Fostering Service

The Fostering Service approved ten mainstream foster carer households during 2020/21, an increase on the nine households approved in 2019/20. The Fostering Service continues to develop our foster carer recruitment and retention strategy, using learning from recent years. Since April 2021 we have approved 11 new fostering households, with 15 more currently in the recruitment process and 3 further households awaiting the start of a fostering assessment as at November 2021. Since 2020, 13 Supported Lodgings Hosts have also been recruited.

In April 2018 we introduced the role of Consultant Matching Officer to address the high vacancy rates for our in-house foster carers, which was

37% of our in-house foster carers at that point in time. The vacancy rate is now 7% as at November 2021 showing we are now much better at using our own in-house fostering capacity through matching our children with appropriate in-house foster carers.

A total of 28 foster carers resigned or had their approvals terminated during 2020/21 due to a change in their circumstances, a standard of care issue or retirement. Research has shown that on average approximately 13% of foster carers leave the role each year nationally.

Evidence of Impact

In November 2020, Hackney of Tomorrow, our Children in Care Council, were consulted about their views on children and young people's input to foster carer reviews. As a result of this, in February 2021, we updated the practice guidance for staff in relation to including children's voices in the foster carer review process. In June 2021, a total of 20 brief audits were undertaken on the cohort of carers who had most recently been subject to an Annual Review. Auditors reviewed the foster carer files and were asked to comment on whether the voice of the child was represented in the review process. Auditors found that practice in this area requires improvement. In 95% of annual reviews there were children living in the foster home at the time of the Annual

Review, however, in 30% of the audits it was felt by auditors that the voice of the child was not represented in the review process; when the voice of the child was captured, this was through direct feedback via feedback forms. In 82% of audits where a sibling group was living in the foster home, not all the voices of the sibling group were captured. In response to this audit, unit coordinators in the Fostering Service have been reissued with guidance about recording when feedback forms have been shared with children, and amendments have been made to the Fostering Social Workers Report template to ensure that the voice of the child is more clearly evidenced. We have scheduled to re-audit this area of practice to monitor the impact following these changes.



Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

Hackney of Tomorrow (HoT) - Children in Care Council

Over the past 18 months, Hackney's participation programme has focused on two key objectives: firstly, enhancing the ability of Hackney's Corporate Parenting Service to communicate directly with the young people in its care, ensuring that these young people receive clear and consistent information regarding their care status, rights/entitlements, and any specific opportunities available to them; secondly, to develop the Junior Division of our Children in Care Council, which gives younger children in care the opportunity to participate in and develop the services that they receive from their corporate parents. Highlights from the Hackney of Tomorrow activity over the last 18 months includes:

- In response to the pandemic, HoT operated virtually, then moved to a hybrid model to give children the choice of how to attend weekly meetings and participation projects. This has enabled a wider group of children and young people to connect with HoT.
- Working alongside the Placement Management Unit in the re-tendering of contracts for the semi-independent accommodation pathway for care leavers.
- *Real Talk: Our Views on Social Work Terminology* - From June to September 2020, HoT worked alongside Speech and Language

Therapists from the Virtual School in order to produce a document that presents young people's responses to social work terms and aims to change the use of language within Hackney Children and Families Service.

- HoT met with the Contact Centre provider in September 2020 to advise about the improvements that they would like to see in the service and its facilities. One significant improvement the young people asked for was the provision of a space just for teenagers.
- Hair in Care - in February 2021, HoT planned and commissioned the production of a training film for foster carers, which focused on the difficulties of growing up with afro hair whilst in the care system. The film also presents some practical advice on how to look after afro hair, as many young people have experiences of living with carers who aren't able to meet their needs in this respect.
- Youth Inspection - From November 2020-August 2021, HoT undertook a youth inspection of the Looked After Child Review process. This approach consisted of a peer-delivered survey interview of children and young people who have recently had their Looked After Child Review.



Helping and protecting looked after children

Independent Chairs and Looked After Child Reviews

During the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, Looked After Reviews were being held virtually. The meeting format limited some of the choices children had about the venue of the meeting and the activity to be completed. However, it did not significantly impact attendance and engagement, and

it also offered some opportunities to engage with some attendees who otherwise would not have been able to attend an in-person meeting. All reports and minutes from the meetings continue to be written to the child in an age appropriate way. Through a more child and young person centred approach, these records contribute to life story work and provide a record of achievement for the child.

Evidence of Impact

Feedback on Looked After Review meetings from children and young people:

- *“It focused on where I’ll be in the next six months, what my plan is and my progression. It’s good to know that I have a plan”*
- *“I like the fact that I received a warning about the fact that my review was coming up. It gave me time to think about what I wanted to talk about”*
- *“We just talked - it was online on the computer, which I thought was better than it being in person”*
- *“Sometimes I don’t ask questions in my Looked After Child review because I can just bring it up with my social worker one on one and feel like there’s less pressure”*

Unfortunately due to the cyber attack it is not possible to report how many Looked After Reviews were held and how many took place within timescale. As ever every effort is made to ensure reviews take place within statutory timescales. Where this has not been possible the Service Manager will make

a note of the reasons for this on the child’s record. Requests to change the planned date of a Review, if within 6 weeks of the meeting, need to be agreed by the respective Heads of Service. Depending on the needs of the child the Chair may meet or speak with the child in the interim.

During October 2020 - March 2021 92% of looked after children aged over 4 years participated in their Looked After Review by either attending and directly contribute their views, or chose an alternative means of participation including asking an advocate or nominating another person to share their views, or sharing views through a facilitative medium such as in writing or through pictures. This demonstrates that a change in service delivery methods during lockdown periods did not affect the ability to engage children in their review meetings. Whilst Chairs continue to try and

engage young people in their reviews through an activity based approach this required adaptation within a virtual meeting format. However, Chairs were creative and utilised methods such as 'scavenger hunts'; where virtual attendees all had to find an item which made them happy then show and explain why to the other attendees, or attendees play a piece of music that they felt represented the young person, children putting emojis in the chat function to represent feelings about certain topics etc.

Evidence of Impact

The Hackney of Tomorrow youth inspection of Looked After Child Reviews during November 2020-August 2021 found that:

- 84% of young people understood what their review was before they took part
- 95% of young people felt those attending their review cared about them
- 90% of young people felt their review was focused on them
- 85% of young people felt their review would benefit them in the long run

Young people commented:

- *I know my Social Worker wants the best for me and this comes out a lot in my reviews*
- *With everything that was said and any decisions that were made, my opinion was asked.*



Health of looked after children

Physical health of looked after children

Hackney Looked After Children Health Service is delivered by a dedicated team closely aligned with Hackney's universal school-based health service and is co-located with the Virtual School to promote the delivery of a more holistic and integrated service to our looked after children and young people.

Percentage of looked after children whose health checks were in time during a 12 month period

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Hackney	91 %	96 %	91 %
England	90 %	90 %	n/a

The number of children with an up to date health assessment has maintained a comparable performance to the England average.

Percentage of looked after children whose immunisations are up to date

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Hackney	70 %	57 %	59 %
England	87 %	88 %	n/a

The number of children with up to date immunisations is low, and work is underway with the Council's Public Health Service to understand this across the City of London and Hackney.

Percentage of looked after children who have an up to date dental check

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Hackney	71 %	81 %	64 %
England	85 %	86 %	n/a

The number of children with an up to date dental check has declined due to the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 had a significant impact nationally on the performance for health assessments, optician and dental checks, as well as immunisations as sections of the health service closed to in-person appointments or refocused resources in efforts to contain the impact of the pandemic. Work is underway to ensure children and young people we care for are now up to date with these checks following the easing of lockdown restrictions.



Mental health of looked after children

The completion rate for SDQs (Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires) decreased from 77 % of looked after children in 2019/20 to 73 % in 2020/21, in part due to the challenges of completing health assessments overall during the pandemic. However, we know that this is an area of critical importance for our looked after children, so we have now shifted our focus to ensure that SDQ scores are completed prior to a Review Health Assessment, so that mental health needs as well as physical needs can be reviewed at this forum. For those children with an SDQ score, we can see that there has been an improvement in the average score per child - with an average of

11.8 (a lower score is better - high scores are indicative of greater difficulties) in 2020/21 compared to 13.4 in 2019/20.

Our in-house clinicians support children in care in multi-agency planning using a trauma-informed and attachment-focused approach, making sense of children’s behaviours and needs in the context of their earlier life experiences. Clinicians will also support in building care arrangement stability through training and consultation to foster carers and special guardians, that focuses on developing lasting and therapeutic relationships between children and their care-givers. For our care leavers, the Clinical Service will support them to access local services and offer assessment or intervention in a time-limited, goal focused approach. The Clinical Service also supports children living with a Special Guardian and children who can access the Adoption Support Fund.

Strengths and difficulties questionnaire	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	England 2020-21	SN 2020-21
Children looked after for at least 12 months aged 4 to 16 with an SDQ score	79.0 %	77.0 %	72.6 %	80 %	86 %
Average score per child	14.7	13.4	11.8	14	12



“Our in-house clinicians support children in care in multi-agency planning using a trauma-informed and attachment-focused approach.”





Learning

The Virtual School

The Virtual School team provides additional educational support for children looked after, from early years all the way through to post-16 education and training opportunities, which provides continuity for children and young people in care. The Virtual School is well-resourced and includes a variety of roles including social pedagogues, learning mentors, an occupational therapist and speech and language therapists.

Key Stage 4

The progress for pupils in Key Stage 4 is monitored throughout the year and where necessary individual targeted support is offered. Where it is felt appropriate, 1 to 1 tuition is offered. All Year 11 pupils receive support to identify appropriate pathways once statutory schooling has ended, and when necessary, are accompanied to college open days and interviews by a member of the Virtual School staff.

Key Stage 4 Attainment in 2020

The GCSE examinations did not take place in 2020 and all children were given a grade by teacher assessment. The usual measures of Progress 8 and attainment 8 do not apply and only passes in English and maths can be reported.

In 2020 the results reported on all the children in our looked after cohort who were in year 11 and does not take into account the usual Department for Education measure of children who have been in care for at least a year.

Percentage of children achieving Grade 4 at Key Stage 4

	Grade 4 and above
English Language	21 %
English Literature	24 %
Maths	22 %

There are no national comparable measures available for this year.



Key Stage 2

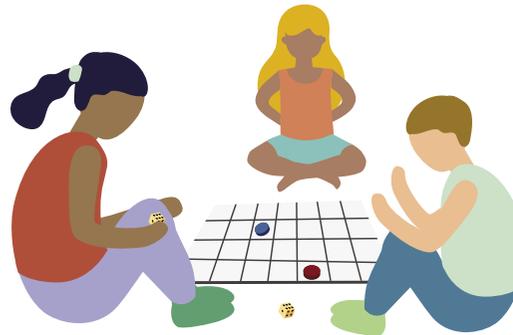
Pupils in year 6 are closely monitored and additional support is provided if it is necessary. All pupils are offered support for the transition to secondary school, and links are made with designated teachers before children transition to their new school.

In 2020 no SATs tests took place. Children were teacher-assessed against the national standard. This year the usual reporting mechanism of the Department for Education does not apply and all young people in the cohort have been included.

Percentage of children working at the required standard at Key Stage 2

	Working at the required standard
Reading	35 %
Writing	31 %
Maths	28 %

There are no national comparable measures available this year.





Stability and permanence

Care arrangement stability

Percentage of looked after children with three or more care arrangements in one year

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Hackney	13 %	12 %	10 %
Statistical Neighbour	11 %	10 %	9 %
England	11 %	11 %	9 %

There has been a positive decrease in the number of children experiencing three or more care arrangements over the course of a year - the 2020/21 outturn was 10 % which is in line only slightly higher than the statistical neighbour and national averages of 9 %. However, the proportion of adolescents coming into care who have more complex needs and experience greater care arrangement instability has increased. In recognition that this will be an ongoing issue in Hackney due to older children entering care, the Head of Corporate Parenting has reviewed the panels where decisions are made about care planning for children to ensure that there is critical oversight by senior leaders at key points for children who are at risk of coming into care, and that there is critical quality assurance for those children and young people already in our care. The Corporate Parenting Service is also introducing an Edge of

Care pilot to try and keep adolescents safely at home wherever this is possible. Recruitment to this project is currently underway.

The percentage of children aged under 16 who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years, who have lived in the same home for over 2 years

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Hackney	62 %	66 %	77 %
Statistical Neighbour	70 %	71 %	70 %
England	69 %	68 %	71 %

There has been a positive increase in the proportion of children aged under 16 who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years, who have lived in the same home for over 2 years (77 % in 2020/21 compared to 66 % in 2019/20). Hackney's performance against this indicator is better than the statistical neighbour and England averages in 2020/21. While this may reflect the impact of the pandemic, we have continued to invest in our fostering service to support stability for children in our care. This has included a new therapeutic fostering group; a new support group for male carers; the continued expansion of the Mockingbird Model and ongoing oversight of decision-making around planned and unplanned moves for children through a multi-agency panel that focuses on stability for children.

Care arrangement types as at 31 March 2021

Care arrangement type	Number of looked after children
Foster care arrangements	304 (71 %)
Placed for adoption	3 (1 %)
Care arrangements with parents	23 (5 %)
Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation	96 (23 %)
Total	426 (100%)

The vast majority of Hackney's looked after children are living with foster carers and the service continues to increase the number of in-house foster carers available to support them. At 31 March 2021, 156 children were living with in-house foster carers including connected persons carers and 148 children were living with Independent Fostering Agency carers.

Care arrangements for looked after children by location at 31 March 2021

Care arrangements location	Number of Children
Hackney	101 (24 %)
Under 20 miles from Hackney	223 (52 %)
Over 20 miles from Hackney	71 (17 %)

(Note - distance for unaccompanied asylum seeking children is not captured within this performance measure)

The majority of our looked after children were living in homes in or within 20 miles of Hackney at 76 % in March 2021 - this was the same percentage in March 2020. The majority of Hackney's looked after children are living in homes within commuting distance of Hackney. There is a strong focus on ensuring that all children, regardless of where they are living, receive the same level of support.



Mockingbird Project

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative research-based method of delivering foster care using the Mockingbird Family Model, developed in the USA. The model centres on a constellation where one foster home acts as a hub, offering advice, training and support to 6-10 satellite foster or kinship families. The hub home builds strong relationships with all those in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and to build on strengths and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to breakdown. Evaluations of the Mockingbird Family Model show improved outcomes for children, young people and carers, with improved stability of care arrangements, connection with siblings, and foster carer support and retention. The project launched Hackney's first hub home in August 2019, with the second constellation established in October 2021, and a third planned to start in December 2021. The Mockingbird model promotes stability and continuity for children and young people - to date we have only had one care arrangement breakdown within the model and this child was able to be moved to another carer within their constellation who they already knew well.

Hackney is part of Adopt London North which consists of six local authorities: Hackney, Camden, Islington, Enfield, Barnet and Haringey...



Adoption

In October 2019, Adopt London North took over responsibility for adoption services in Hackney - this means that they manage the recruitment of prospective adopters, matching children to adoptive families and the adoption process for children and families, as well as post-adoption support. In 2020/21, 5 looked after children ceased to be looked after and were adopted in Hackney (3% of those children who ceased to be looked after in 2020/21) - which is lower than the 11 children in 2019/20 and 12 children in 2018/19. This is below our statistical neighbours, that had an average of 5% of children leaving care via adoption in 2020/21.

The average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family (adjusted for foster care adoptions) in Hackney

between 2017-2020 was 388 days, similar to the England average of 367 days and the statistical neighbour average of 362 days. The average time in days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family between 2017-2020 was 233 days in Hackney; this is slower than the England average of 175 days and slightly slower than the statistical neighbour average of 221 days. The average time in days between a child entering care and a placement order being approved between 2017-2020 was 190 days in Hackney, faster than the England average of 261 days and the statistical neighbour average of 294 days. Many of the increases for these indicators were as a direct result of the challenges the Courts faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Care Leavers and transitions

Care Leaver information

376 care leavers aged between 17 and 21 were being supported by the Leaving Care service at 31 March 2021, a 12% increase compared to 335 at the same point in 2020. This number has decreased to 299 care leavers aged 17-21 at the end of September 2021. There were 79 care leavers aged 22 and older being supported as at 31st March 2021, the same number as at March 2020. This has decreased to 72 care leavers being supported aged 22 and older as at 30th September 2021.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	SN 2020-21	England 2020-21
% of care leavers aged 19-21 who were in education, employment or training	65 %	65 %	56 %	55 %	53 %
% of care leavers aged 19-21 who were in suitable accommodation	80 %	86 %	87 %	86 %	85 %
% of care leavers aged 19-21 who were in higher education	11 %	10 %	11 %	8 %	6 %

56% of Hackney care leavers aged 19 or 20 were in education, employment or training in 2020/21. This is in line with statistical neighbours (55%) but lower than the 65% in Hackney in 2019/20. Some of this decrease in performance is linked to the impact of Covid-19 on employment opportunities for care leavers (the statistical neighbour average is the most recently published data and is for the previous year). The consistent support offered by the Virtual School and social workers during the last year has again resulted in a low number of care leavers who are NEET (not in education, employment or training). There has been an increase in the percentage of care leavers who were in higher education in Hackney - from 10% in 2019-20 to 11% 2020-21, much higher than the national average of 6%.

The percentage of care leavers aged 19-21 who were in suitable accommodation in 2020/21 was 87%, an increase from 86% last year. Housing is a challenge both locally and nationally but the Service will continue efforts to improve the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation in partnership with the Council's Housing Needs Service.

Pathway plans

While pathway plan performance is improving with 47% of pathway plans for care leavers reviewed within 6 months as at 31st March 2021, which has increased to 58% as at 30th September 2021, there is still more work to do to achieve the 100% compliance target set by the service for the end of March 2022. Data as at November 2021 shows that 31% of pathway plans were out of timescale, an improvement on September 2021 when 44% were out of timescale. A new panel has been established with the Service

Manager and Practice Development Manager reviewing all out of date pathway plans from October 2021.

Evidence of Impact

Pathway plans

An audit of 8 pathway plans for care leavers aged 18 and older took place in May 2021 and found that practice in this area required improvement. Good examples of plans were written directly to the young person, clearly captured specific areas of strength and need, and it was evident that practitioners had developed strong, open, trusting relationships with young people over time. In some instances, the frequency of contact with young people needed to improve in line with our practice standards, and the style of pathway plans needed to be more consistent and written to the young person. Next steps to improve practice in this area included ensuring visits to care leavers were taking place in line with our practice standards and recorded correctly. These areas are being closely monitored by managers in the service.

Audits of support for care leavers take place routinely to understand the quality of practice in this area. From May - July 2021, 12 audits show that practice is rated as requires improvement, with greater focus on the quality and timeliness of pathway plans needed, and an increase in management oversight needed. There was generally good safety planning on the young

person's case file where this was necessary, as well as good overall recording evidenced on the young person's case file.

Care leavers annual survey

Each year we undertake a survey of our children in care and care leavers. In January-March 2021, we surveyed our care leavers and headlines from this survey include, from 21 responses:

- 81% said they find it easy to speak to their Leaving Care worker - an increase from 73% in the last survey in 2020.
- 90% said their Leaving Care worker helps wthem with problems they have - an increase from 76% in the last survey.
- 90% said their Leaving Care worker does what they say they will - an increase from 73% in the last survey

57% said they have someone to speak to where they live, plus another 33% replied 'sometimes'. This is a considerable improvement from the last survey in 2020 where only 13% said they had someone to speak to where they live (plus another 20% said 'sometimes').

Apprenticeships and employment support for care leavers

The Employment Pathways Team within Hackney Works manages a range of early career programmes. This includes supported internships; the new government Kickstart Scheme which aims to generate six-month work placements for 16-24 year olds who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment; and also the Hackney Council apprenticeship programme, which guarantees an interview for care leavers. Hackney Council currently offers more than 100 apprentice placements in many different departments, such as Housing, ICT, Trades, Business Administration, Youth Work, and Finance. Currently the programme has a 75 % success rate, in terms of supporting those enrolled

on an apprenticeship into work or a higher level apprenticeship at the conclusion of their apprenticeship. As well as the Council offering a range of apprenticeships within the Council, the Council also works with other local providers in the private sector to develop apprenticeship opportunities, although these apprenticeships do not offer a guaranteed interview for care leavers. Currently, wherever appropriate, the Virtual School and the Leaving Care Service support young people to apply for local apprenticeship opportunities and spend time with each young person who applies to ensure their application form is the best it can be. Work is underway to further strengthen our employment offer to care leavers within the Council, with a number of proposals being explored with senior leaders, including ring-fencing opportunities for care leavers.

Evidence of Impact

Disabled looked after children and transitions

An audit was undertaken in October 2021 on the theme of the experiences of our looked after children and care leavers who are disabled. These included a review of practice for: 6 looked after children who have a disability; 4 care leavers who have a disability and 2 in-house foster carers who care for a child with a disability. The audits found evidence of good practice, including long-term settled and loving homes, high quality recording and detailed, well-considered reports and high levels of multi-agency support. Audits also found areas of improvement needed, including the need to do more to begin transition planning for disabled children earlier, with greater clarity required within the service about transition processes for disabled looked after children, including a stronger understanding across the service of the options available post-18

and how we best prepare young people and their carers for this transition. As a result of this audit, multi-agency practice guidance about transition planning for looked after children who are disabled is being developed with Adult Social Care in November/ December 2021 to clarify roles, responsibilities and processes in the hope of improving this transition process for our young people.

Leaving Care Welfare and Benefits

Following the introduction of a dedicated Leaving Care Welfare and Benefits Officer in March 2020, we have had a 34% increase in the number of care leavers claiming the correct benefits for their accommodation. Hackney is currently at 73% of all eligible young people claiming which is the highest figure we have had in the last 5 years.

Young people have been feeding back about their experience of using the Leaving Care Welfare and Benefits service:

- *“The officer was easy to reach if I had any queries. She would take any phone calls to help guide me through any bits I was uncertain with. She answered any questions my carers and I had and was also very lovely and understanding!”*
- *“I am really bad at filling out forms, that’s one of my weaknesses but the officer guided me through everything and was patient with me and when I made mistakes she told me what to correct and I was able to complete everything.”*





The Impact of Leaders on Social Work Practice with Children and Families

A significant number of changes to our practice model have been made over a relatively short period of time as part of our accelerated focus on improvement in 2021, which some staff have told us they have found challenging. Work is underway to fully embed these changes and ensure that staff at all levels fully understand the expectations of their roles. Good progress is being made in terms of our focus on anti-racist practice and

leaders are appropriately refining the approach to quality assurance to evidence the quality of practice and impact of changes. The complex work to develop a comprehensive case recording system for the Children and Families Service has continued to be a top priority for the Council and this is being driven by senior leaders to ensure social workers have the tools they need to do their jobs well.

A significant number of changes to our practice model have been made over a relatively short period of time as part of our accelerated focus on improvement in 2021 ...





Strategic Leadership

Driving improvement

Our focus on improvement accelerated from early 2021, with a refocused energy to make the changes needed to improve our service for children at pace. This has included taking decisive action to improve management oversight on cases, through reviewing our line management structure as well as introducing robust supervision arrangements. The legacy of the cyberattack in October 2020 cannot be understated, and the complex work to develop a comprehensive case recording system for the Children and Families Service has continued to be a top priority for the Council. The new Group Director of Children and Education has driven this work since she started in post in August 2021. There is a commitment and clear plans in place to ensure that practitioners are able to record on children's case files on a comprehensive recording system (Mosaic) by April 2022, and this plan and timescales have been communicated to practitioners.

The Ofsted focused visit in July 2021 provided a helpful stocktake and an external perspective on where we are at in our improvement journey and confirmed that we know ourselves well through our quality assurance framework. Inspectors found that: "dedicated scrutiny by senior leaders and strengthened management oversight mean that children in Hackney are benefiting from improving social work practice when they are in need or on a child protection plan." The Ofsted visit also provided additional external scrutiny of the changes we have made to the Hackney model of social work over the last year to further strengthen management oversight of frontline practice, and increase transparency and accountability in the service.

We have worked on refreshing our improvement plan to incorporate the learning from the focused visit and to stretch ourselves to focus on getting to outstanding in terms of the support we provide to children and families.

The refreshed improvement plan is themed around the priorities outlined at the start of this report. Strong governance arrangements continue to monitor and drive our improvement, with an officer board chaired by the Chief Executive, and a member board co-chaired by the Mayor and Lead Member providing clear accountability for senior leaders.

Changes to Hackney model of social work

Focus on increasing the line of sight of senior leaders and management oversight

Many of the changes that have been introduced over the last year aim to increase the line of sight from senior leaders to frontline practice. These include the introduction of the Need to Know Forum and Need to Know Briefings from March 2021 to ensure a clear line of sight up to the statutory Director of Children's Services on practice where there are matters of high risk that relate directly to a child, young person and/or family or where there are other serious high risk matters that impact significantly on the local authority. As well as the introduction of a new monthly quality assurance process that all managers from the frontline to senior managers in the service take part in (further information is included in the section on Learning Culture below).

We have focused on strengthening management oversight, including through the realignment of the Practice Development Manager role from Spring 2021 to create an additional level of management without case holding responsibility in the Family Intervention and Support Service and the Corporate Parenting Service, with an increased emphasis on leadership and a focus on ensuring consistency of practice across social work units.

We have also strengthened the Children’s Resource Panel, chaired by the Director of Children’s Social Care, to make it clearer that the panel makes the decision as to whether or not a child is going to come into the care of the local authority. The panel also reviews and approves requests for residential care arrangements and approval of care arrangements of children at home with parents.

Case allocation and introduction of individual professional casework supervision

In February 2021 we fundamentally changed the way that work with

children is allocated within the service, with children now allocated to individual social workers as opposed to a social work unit. This change has engendered individual accountability for individual social workers, improved transparency and provided more equity and consistency in terms of case management across individual social work units across the directorate.

One of the key improvements in the service in 2021 was the roll out of individual professional casework supervision from April 2021, following on from the introduction of individual case allocation. A new supervision policy was introduced, supported by mandatory training for every practice manager in the Children and Families Service.

Evidence of Impact

Regular supervision audits have been scheduled to monitor the quality of supervision being delivered and the recording of this on children’s files. Casework supervision records will provide key evidence about the progress of children’s plans and the quality of management oversight in achieving great outcomes for children in accordance with Hackney’s practice standards. An audit of 67 supervision records undertaken in May/June 2021 found that 58% were graded ‘good’ or better (6% outstanding, 52% good, 33%

requires improvement and 9% inadequate). The audits evidenced a very strong focus on outcomes and progress of the child’s plan, strong voice of the child, very strong management oversight, and clear contingency planning. Areas for improvement identified included exploration of identity / anti-racist practice / social GRAAACES and this will be addressed through our anti-racist action plan.

- ... A new supervision policy was introduced, supported by mandatory training for every practice manager in the Children and Families Service.





Anti-Racist Practice

Children and Families Service Anti-Racist Position Statement

Hackney Children and Families Service is committed to eradicating systemic racism, discrimination, injustice, making anti-racism a foundation of our practice. We will be a voice and force for change, for every child and family that we work for and with, to recognise and address the impact of racism on children and families within our practice, to apply our antiracist principles in all of our interactions with and decision-making about children and to determinedly and actively, demand the same from our partners. We will be committed to calling out racism, discrimination, microaggressions and will ensure that this is addressed at all levels in the council to ensure that children and their families and the workforce are supported and valued.

Within Hackney Children and Families Service, we acknowledge the harm and impact of racism and that the experience of our Black staff and those from other global majority ethnic groups, is not the same as that of our white staff and we are committed to ensuring that all voices are represented and heard at every level providing support to staff who experience work-based racism and microaggressions. To that end, making sure that our workforce reflects the community which we serve, especially at the senior leadership level.

Our Anti-Racist Action Plan Goals

- 1. Inclusive Recruitment and Aspirational Support for Staff:** Staff workforce is representative of the child and family population in Hackney at all levels, including at senior leadership levels.
- 2. Anti-Racist Leadership and Practice with Children and Families:** Leadership and practice with children and families takes a pro-actively anti-racist stance to address racism, discrimination and inequality.
- 3. Promoting Anti-Racist Practice to influence broader systems that affect children and families' lives:** Leaders and practitioners across the Children and Families Service take action to address structural racism and proactively lead, support and constructively challenge the broader system including in partnership discussions as required.

Building upon work undertaken as part of the Improving Outcomes for Young Black Men Programme, in July 2020, Children and Families Services committed to create and implement our anti-racist action plan. Our Anti-Racist Position Statement, makes clear the journey we need to take as a service to improve the experience and progression of our staff but, importantly, the Children and Young people of Hackney who are disproportionately affected by racism. We are committed to fighting racism and being anti-racist in the Children and Families Service. From the beginning, we knew that to really achieve this, anti-racism work had to take a “grassroots” approach, including the broadest possible range of experience and perspectives from across the whole of our diverse workforce.

Currently, colleagues involved in the action plan represent the diversity of our workforce, with accountability held by the Senior Leadership Team and representatives from Black and Global majority ethnic staff who form our Promoting Racial Equality Leadership Group (PRELG). Our new Diversity and Inclusion Lead role steers the anti-racist action plan, ensuring that our working groups and focus groups are a safe space for everyone involved - valuing all perspectives and experiences equally. This ethos is important as it allows colleagues from different areas and levels of position to come together with openness and honesty. Our initial achievements include:

- Re-launch of the Promoting Racial Equality Leadership group in October 2021.
- Lets Talk Anti Racist Podcast Series over summer-autumn 2021.
- Reviewed and made recommendations in respect of our Children and Families Service Recruitment Protocol and developed our Anti-Racist Practice Standards which will be launched January 2022
- 3 year programme of anti-racist conversations through Action Learning Sets for all staff; first round to be evaluated by end 2021
- Racialised trauma peer support groups launched in partnership with the Corporate Strategy and Policy team - September-December 2021
- First joint workshop with colleagues in Hackney Education to review synergy in respective anti-racist action plans and opportunities to closely collaborate took place November 2021
- Diversity in Recruitment Champion Training due to be initiated January 2022
- Children and Families Service Anti Racist Praxis Conference on Racial Trauma - scheduled for April 2022



Workforce and caseloads

A refreshed Workforce Development Strategy for 2022 onwards is being finalised to further develop our workforce to meet the need for accountable, flexible and highly skilled practitioners and support staff.

A particular focus for the service over the coming year is the recruitment and retention of staff. We will be reviewing our offer to social workers to ensure we are able to recruit excellent social workers at all levels in the highly competitive London jobs market, as well as strengthening our induction, training and development offer to retain and progress our staff.

An extensive training and learning programme is currently in place which includes a comprehensive ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programme for newly qualified social workers with 13 ASYE social workers in the service at November 2021; and a staff training programme, which is informed and developed with feedback from staff. We will be working on further strengthening these learning programmes over the coming months, including for new managers.

A refreshed exit interview process has now been in place since April 2020.

All staff leaving the organisation are offered the opportunity to contribute feedback through exit interviews. Over the past 3 months, 11 exit interviews were conducted with staff leaving the organisation. Key findings from exit interviews are analysed in more detail and discussed at the Workforce Development Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care to ensure this quality assurance information informs our action plans for the service.

Staff wellbeing

Regular virtual drop in and engagement sessions have continued with the new leadership to ensure that staff views are listened to. The Staff Reference Group that was established in summer 2020 has also continued to meet, acting as a critical friend and sounding board to senior leaders on service improvement and policy development, as well as overall staff wellbeing. Following changes in senior leadership the Staff Reference Group has been relaunched and is now meeting with the Director of Children's Social Care every 6 weeks.

Evidence of Impact

We have carried out a number of surveys over the last 18 months to understand staff welfare and wellbeing. These have included the Research in Practice Social Work Organisational Research Diagnostic (SWORD) in summer 2021 and a Council-wide staff survey in Autumn 2021.

Research in Practice Social Work Organisational Research Diagnostic survey

The findings of the Research in Practice Social Work Organisational Research Diagnostic (SWORD) were largely positive and 130

members of staff responded. **Overall:**

- 17% of staff felt their work was mildly stressful;
- 45% found work to be moderately stressful;
- 28% found work to be very stressful; and
- 7% found work to be extremely stressful

Areas of strength identified in the survey included:

- 87% of staff agree that managers are available when they need support
- 88% of staff responded positively in relation to feeling respected and supported by their colleagues
- 83% of staff responded positively when asked if they found their job meaningful
- 71% of staff feel they are able to access the training needed to do their job
- There was a general sense that staff are treated fairly (81% positive response rate) and that staff feel they are trusted to do a good job (92% positive response rate)

Areas to develop:

- 64% of staff responded negatively when asked if change was managed sensitively with a balance maintained between change and stability with 29% of respondents 'strongly disagreeing' with this statement
- 65% of respondents disagreed that there was an understanding of the impact of organisational change and action taken to manage it effectively

These findings have influenced the development of the refreshed Workforce Development Strategy for 2022 onwards that is currently being finalised.

Council staff survey

The findings from the Council-wide staff survey in Autumn 2021 for the Children and Education Directorate were broadly in line with the Research in Practice survey. 82% of staff feel that their manager genuinely cares about their wellbeing, 79% of staff feel that they are part of a team, and 81% of staff are able to take time out from work when they need to. Key areas for improvement include that only 30% of staff think that morale is high (this was in line with the findings for the wider Council), 23% think that something is done when someone is not performing in their role, and 39% think that leaders have communicated a motivating vision.

We recognise that morale in some parts of the service may be lower following the impact of the pandemic and the cyberattack, together with the process of embedding some of the changes we have introduced over the last year to improve and drive progress for children. Ofsted confirmed what we already knew in July 2021 that “many staff are very happy working in Hackney and feel well supported through a unique and complex set of challenges. For some staff, the pace of change has been too quick and they have not felt as well informed as they would have liked. The skilled workforce recognises the benefits of the changes and understands that some resetting of baseline expectations was necessary. Senior leaders understand that, having laid solid foundations, there is more work to do to support staff during the ongoing changes.”

We recognise that we have further work to do to ensure we manage change well and keep staff on board with any further changes we make to improve practice and outcomes for children and families, and to continue to embed the changes we have already made.

Workforce data

Percentage of agency social workers

	2019	2020	2021
Hackney	28.1 %	32 %	22 %
Statistical Neighbour	23.1 %	22 %	n/a
England	15.8 %	15.4 %	n/a

There has been a decrease of 10 percentage points in the percentage of agency staff as a total of our social workers as at 30 September 2021, which has brought us in line with the statistical neighbour average of 22 % in 2020. The service has focused on recruiting staff permanently wherever possible, including recruiting existing agency staff to permanent roles, and reducing staff numbers where demand has been reduced as a result of the changes we have made in managing thresholds at the front door, and the reduction in referrals as a result of the pandemic. In 2020, the higher agency staffing reflected measures that were put in place during the year to temporarily increase social worker capacity to respond to increases in demand in the service.

Vacancy rate for permanent social workers

	2019	2020	2021
Hackney	24 %	23 %	22 %
Statistical Neighbour	22 %	21 %	n/a
England	16 %	16 %	n/a

Hackney's vacancy rate for permanent social workers has continued to decrease from 24 % in 2019 to 22 % as at the end of September 2021.

This is closer to our statistical neighbours, but still higher than the England average for the last year.

Percentage rate of social worker turnover

	2019	2020	2021
Hackney	8.3	15.9	11.7
Statistical Neighbour	16.8	16	n/a
England	15.1	13.5	n/a

Our social worker turnover rate reduced from 15.9 in 2020 to 11.7 in 2021, representing an improvement in retaining social workers during this period. As our practitioners have faced considerable challenges over the last year including the continued pandemic and the significant impact of the cyberattack in Hackney on our recording systems and their day to day work experience, we are proud that our social worker turnover rate actually decreased during this period meaning we were able to support and retain staff.

Cases (children) per social worker (based on FTE equivalents)

	2019	2020	2021
Hackney	18	16.4	14
Statistical Neighbour	15	14.0	n/a
England	17	16.3	n/a

Hackney's average social worker caseload, as calculated using the Department for Education methodology, has decreased over the past year as the number of children and the number of social workers have reduced in the service. However this measure does not reflect an accurate picture of caseloads for our social workers as it divides the number of children we

are supporting equally across all case holding social workers, including our Consultant Social Workers and ASYE social workers who hold smaller caseloads. As at 30 September 2021, the average caseload for social workers (excluding Consultant Social Workers) was 17 children. This figure still does not account for the lower caseloads held by our ASYE social workers, so the reality for some social workers will be higher than this average caseload figure.

As a result of individual casework allocation we are now more effectively able to monitor caseloads for individual practitioners and this enables us to be more agile in allocating resources according to need. Our aim is that

ASYE Social Workers will hold no more than 11 or 12 children; case holding social workers will hold around 18 children; and Consultant Social Workers will hold approximately 5 children, alongside their management duties. The very nature of work in the Access and Assessment Service means that caseloads will fluctuate around these numbers at times. The weekly Children and Families Management Team allows for a weekly check in with Heads of Service on any specific workload pressures and an opportunity to step in to find solutions as a focused leadership team, coupled with the implementation of the Driving Quality, Improvement and Performance (DQIP) framework, there is now a strong line of sight from the Director to the frontline practitioner.

- As a result of individual casework allocation we are now more effectively able to monitor caseloads for individual practitioners and this enables us to be more agile in allocating resources according to need ●●●





Learning culture

Continuing to strengthen our approach to Quality Assurance

Our quality assurance framework is focused on continuous improvement and we strive to ensure that we are always learning from the children and families we support. We revisit our framework regularly and our most recent changes to the audit programme include our response to the cyberattack and subsequent lack of access to children's records by introducing a 'Live Learning' audit approach. We have also introduced clearer audit moderation and follow-up processes, with further work to fully embed these across the service being introduced in the coming months.

Full audits are moderated by the auditor's line manager, who will be at a Head of Service level or more senior. For brief audits, these are moderated by a Service Manager who does not oversee the work being audited, using a moderation tool. All audits that have found practice to be 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' are subject to a re-audit once 3 months have passed, to check that improvement actions highlighted by the auditor have been complete, and that practice for that child/ren has now reached 'good'. Where practice is found to be 'inadequate' in an audit, responsible Service Managers are required to undertake 2 dip sample audits of practice so as to explore whether this is as a result of practice with just one child or whether there is a theme of poor practice with an individual practitioner. Each line manager has a responsibility for tracking practice improvement following an audit outcome of 'inadequate'.

Quality assurance is not limited to audit activity however, and as part of our work to strengthen our approach to quality assurance, we have also

reviewed the support needed to deliver wider assurance such as feedback from children and families and how this links to our workforce development and improvement work. In May 2021 our Safeguarding and Learning Team was formally restructured following a consultation and became the Quality Assurance and Improvement Team with 4 distinct hubs, one of which is dedicated to Quality Assurance. Within the Complaints and Feedback Hub we have recruited a dedicated permanent family feedback officer to more proactively gather and analyse feedback from children and their families, including through the development of parent/carer and young people advisory groups. A refreshed family feedback programme will be launched in Spring 2022 to ensure this programme is driving improvements to practice and is a key strand of our quality assurance framework.

During the Ofsted focused visit, inspectors found "managers and leaders are well informed through an audit process that provides a targeted focus on specific areas of practice that have needed development, such as multi-agency strategy discussions and fuller 'live learning' audits". We were already aware that we needed to strengthen our audit moderation process and following up the impact of audits and Ofsted also recognised this as outlined above.

We have worked to increase the number of Independent Chairs in order to reduce caseloads to enable Chairs to have more effective oversight of practice including through introducing a consistent approach to mid-point monitoring between Looked After Reviews and Child Protection Conferences and engaging Independent Chairs in our audit programme. During the Ofsted focused visit in July 2021, inspectors noted that "independent reviewing officers maintain effective oversight that includes a helpful mid-

point review”. An audit of the mid-way oversight on 27 Child Protection Plans that took place in August-September 2021 found that this area requires improvement, with practice improving as the use of the mid-way oversight tool was embedded, with evidence the plan was progressing for the child, or concerns being escalated by the Independent Chair if not.

There has been an increased focus on escalations by Independent Chairs following the cyberattack in October 2020, however the interim social care system makes it harder to record and understand the response to

escalations by Chairs. Escalations have generally been in relation to a lack of or late reports, and lack of progression of actions in plans. We do know that there has been an inconsistent response to escalations when they are raised. In order to better support this work and improve practice, a monthly Independent Chair escalation oversight meeting with the Heads of Service for the Family Intervention and Support Service and Corporate Parenting was introduced from November 2021.

Evidence of Impact

The cyberattack in October 2020 meant that we were prevented from accessing any of our records for children and also meant that we did not have a service wide recording system to access newly created records at that point in time. Service areas continued with routine brief audits, contacting individual practitioners and managers to access key documents that they held within unit shared files. In this context we adapted our approach to auditing and introduced a ‘Live Learning’ approach to our full Case Review Day audits, engaging practitioners in an Appreciative Enquiry dialogue whilst reviewing records created for children since October 2020, with a focus for this audit round in particular upon the impact of the cyberattack upon practice and our evidence of practice since that time. This audit took place in April 2021 and found that practice required improvement. **The audit found that:**

- Practitioners know families well and have positive relationships with children

- Positive exploration of identity with assessments and interventions
- Recording does not reflect practice (includes cyber attack impact/challenges of interim system)
- Escalation with partner agencies not consistently taking place
- Not enough challenge to families blocking visits citing Covid-19

Areas for improvement identified included the need to resolve the ICT issues affecting practitioners’ ability to record effectively; the need to ensure plans are goal-focused with time-frames and reviews in place to measure practice; the need to strengthen escalation with partner agencies; and engagement with fathers.

Key to our strengthened approach to quality assurance is the introduction of the Driving Quality, Improvement and Performance (DQIP) forum from June 2021 - the central Children and Families Service meeting to evidence and

reflect on the quality of practice in the service. This involves a monthly cycle of managers at all levels of the organisation evidencing and reflecting on what is working well / what are we worried about / what needs to happen in

the following areas:

- the workforce
- practice
- service performance in the 3 months
- feedback from quality assurance

The DQIP framework increases transparency and accountability within the system and supports a 'bottom up' approach to quality assurance so that all levels of managers are involved in the process and are accountable for performance and improvement in their units/services. The monthly DQIP forum, chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care, has a critical role in the quality assurance of the Children and Families Service as the forum where quantitative and qualitative learning is brought together in combination with reporting from every practice line manager in the service. The purpose of the DQIP framework is to quality assure against the standards that have been set for practice across the Children and Families Service and to drive improvements in practice in a transparent way. This includes information from the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service to support our learning about the impact of practice, such as Independent

Chair escalations; complaints learning; feedback from children and families; internal audits; City and Hackney Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency audits; and learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Four DQIP cycles have taken place to date, and we are continuing to embed and develop this process to ensure it has impact and drives improvements in practice.

Further to staff feedback following the Ofsted ILACS inspection and a successful pilot in 2020, we have also developed an approach to ensure senior and middle managers get a better sense of live practice across the service, ensuring that we are better connected and supportive of frontline practitioners whilst identifying strengths and any areas for further development across the service. Learning Visits provide an opportunity for line managers and senior managers to accompany practitioners to home visits or meetings with families to provide support and to ensure senior and middle managers retain direct experience of live practice and to enable them to experience the quality of practice across our services to children and their families. We will be rolling out Learning Visits across the service from January 2022 and incorporating the learning into our monthly DQIP quality assurance framework.

... A refreshed family feedback programme will be launched in Spring 2022 to ensure this programme is driving improvements to practice and is a key strand of our quality assurance framework.





Financial Update

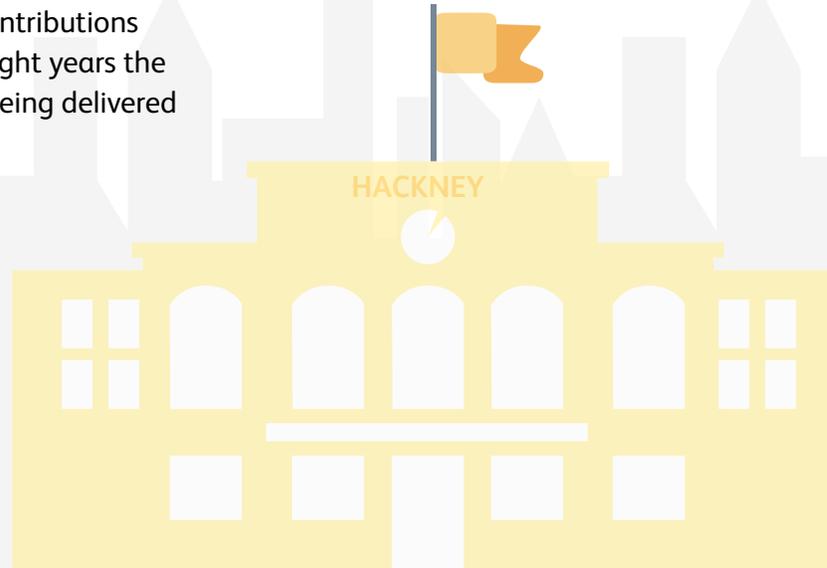
The outturn for 2020/21 for the Children and Families Service on a net budget of £61.5m was an overspend of £3.2m after use of grants and reserves of £10.5m including a drawdown on the Commissioning Reserve of £3.9m and £4.7m of Social Care Grant funding. The overspend of £3.2m including £2m of Covid-19 related expenditure incurred by the service. There has been a requirement to draw down from the Commissioning Reserve since 2012/13 due to the increased number of children in care and a shortage of in-house foster carers.

The financial position for 2021/22 is a net budget of £61m for the Children and Families Service, and the service is forecasting to overspend by £2.4m (as at October 2021) after use of reserves and drawdown of grants totalling £13.2m (including full use of the commissioning activity reserve of £3.7m and £6.3m of Social Care Grant funding). The overspend of £2.4m includes £1.2m of Covid-19 related expenditure incurred by the service. Within the current forecast, cost reduction proposals have been agreed by the service to reduce the overspend.

The Children and Families Service has continued to make contributions to the efficiency agenda of the Council. Over the previous eight years the service has delivered £11.6m savings with a further £280k being delivered

in 2021/22. The increase in commissioning costs has been driven by an increase in the number of looked after children since 2011/12. There is a continuation of a large proportion of children being placed with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) due to a lack of suitable in-house foster carers. The cost of an IFA care arrangement is significantly greater than that of an in-house care arrangement.

Hackney has also seen an increase in residential care arrangements since 2015 adding considerable budget pressures with an average annual unit cost of £250k. We are also seeing a rise in the number of under 18s in high-cost semi-independent care arrangements. Where young people in their late teens are deemed to be vulnerable, and in many cases are transitioning from residential to semi-independent care arrangements, where they still require a high level of support and in extreme circumstances bespoke crisis packages. These pressures have been recognised by the Group Director of Finance & Corporate Resources with a growth of £10.1m in total included in the budget.



Front cover image:
Children at Simon Marks School for Festive Film 2020
by Dog Leap Films