

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee 14 th March 2017
AGENDA ITEM:	6
SUBJECT:	Annual Report regarding Children's Social Care
LEAD OFFICER:	Barbara Peacock, Executive Director, People
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learners
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Ian Lewis, Director Early Help and Children's Social Care

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item is contained in the sub-committee's agreed work programme.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	To scrutinise the work of Children's Social Care

The following information has been requested:

- Statistics for children's social care staff: recruitment over the last 12 months and evidence of staff retention
- Size of caseload for ASYEs and for more experienced social workers
- Origin of referrals to children's social care (e.g. police, schools, GPs)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the progress of Children's Social Care. It is an annual report. Due to the timing of the publication of National Indicators, these refer to the year 2015-16. However, the main body of the report refers to progress since the start of the current financial year, April 2016, in order to ensure that members have the opportunity to scrutinise current progress and performance.

1.2 The report aims to give information on all of the main functions of Children's Social Care. In addition, there is considerable reference

within the report to Early Help services. The relationship between Early Help Services and Children's Social Care is vital in ensuring that children receive support before their needs have become so great as to warrant statutory help.

- 1.3 The report gives a range of statistical performance information. Not all indicators are included, as the intention is that the report should give a balance of qualitative assessment and information as well as data. The report therefore comments on the outputs from audits, information from service users, from staff and from our partner agencies. It is important to triangulate this information to understand as full a picture as possible in understanding the effectiveness of a complex service such as Children's Social Care.
- 1.4 The report also looks at some specific areas of service delivery and comments on the more specific performance in regard to those areas.

2. FUNCTIONS AND KEY RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- 2.1 Children's Social Care is based within the Division of Early Help and Children's Social Care. The Youth Offending Service and the Family Justice Centre are also contained within the Division. Services for Special Educational Needs and the support services for Special Schools transferred to the All Age Disability Service within the Adult Social Care Directorate in November 2016.
- 2.2 The main legal frameworks that guide Children's Social Care are:
 - The Children Act 1989
 - The Care Standards Act 2000
 - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
 - The Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - The Children Act 2004
 - Children and Adoption Act 2006
 - Children and Young Persons Act 2008
 - The Children and Families Act 2014
 - The Immigration Act 2016
- 2.3 Additional Key Regulations:
 - Fostering Services Regulations
 - Adoption Agencies Regulations
- 2.4 All of the above have a range of statutory guidance that support them. There is considerable additional guidance but a key document is Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015. This sets out the multi-agency arrangements for the protection of children and their oversight by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The document was considerably shortened following the recommendations by

Professor Eileen Munro in her review of child protection. Croydon subscribes to the London Child Protection Procedures, which are the principal Procedures covering matters concerned with the protection of children.

- 2.5 Safeguarding is defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 as:
- protecting children from maltreatment
 - preventing impairment of children's health and development
 - ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and
 - taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes
- 2.6 Council members have a duty to ensure that children are sufficiently safeguarded within their local authority.
- 2.7 Safeguarding has a much wider remit than the functions provided by Children's Social Care, which carries out particular functions regarding child protection services and children looked after services.
- 2.8 Council Members are also corporate parents to children looked after by the Local Authority and this responsibility extends to young people who have left care and are subject to the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act.
- 2.9 The Corporate Parenting Panel meets five times per year and scrutinises detailed information regarding the services offered to children looked after and care leavers. The Panel is chaired by the Lead Member for Children Families and Learning. The Children's Scrutiny Panel considers the Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board as well as this annual report. In addition, the Scrutiny Panel may request specific reports, as took place in 2016 with a report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and a report on the implications of Lord Laming's Review on the risks to children looked after becoming subject to youth offending processes.
- 2.10 The Lead Member for Children and Families attends the Local Safeguarding Children's Board as a participant observer, as set out in Working Together.
- 2.11 Local Authority members are also members of both the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel.
- 2.12 The Lead Member meets with the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care on at least a fortnightly basis.
- 2.13 Members have been provided with safeguarding training three times in the past year. Further training is planned.

2.14 Budget and Finance - demand management

Children's Social Care budgets remain under considerable pressure with a forecast overspend (Q3) in 2016/17 of £4.31m, which is a deterioration on the previous year. The Council has a statutory duty with regard to vulnerable children and the overspend reported is mainly reflective of the pressures in meeting this statutory requirement.

2.15 Children's Social Care Budget (Excluding 0-25 SEND Service)

Table 1

General Fund	14/15	15/16	16/17
Budget	£45.40m	£48.56m	£49.63m
Outturn	£49.23m	£50.52m	£53.94m
Overspend	£3.83m	£1.96m	£4.31m <i>Q3 forecast</i>

2.16 Significant demand pressures within Children's Social Care have continued from 2015/16 into 2016/17. The main reasons for the forecast overspend are:

- **Looked After Children** - overspends on external placement costs, principally due to new cases. This increase has stabilised in Q3 with minor change to the volumes of clients.
- **Children In Need** – the pressure in this area is driven by the sharp increase in contact and assessment cases (up c.80% year-on-year). This has driven the need for additional agency staff, with a further increase in Q3.
- **Directorate** – the increased demand driving the budget pressures identified above has a knock-on effect to the overall cost of legal fees for Children's Social Care.
- **Safeguarding** – additional agency staffing and increased business support recharges.

Table 2

Service Areas with Budget Pressures	Q3 Forecast Overspend
Looked After Children	£2.54m
Children in Need	£2.04m
Directorate	£0.50m

Safeguarding	£0.36m
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- 2.17 The Director for Early Help and Children's Social Care chairs the Children's Transformation Board. The Board is designed to consider how services can be further developed to meet the needs of children and families at earlier stages and divert them from requiring specialist services. It is also overseeing the delivery of the divisional savings targets.

3. MESSAGES FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 3.1 Incorporating the views of children and their families regarding the services that they receive is extremely important.
- 3.2 In December 2016, staff from the Youth Engagement Service worked with a group of children to hear their views about the services that they have received from social workers and the ways in which they would like to be treated. This was part of the development of our refreshed Vision for Early Help and Children's Social Care, which is set out in Section 4 of this report.
- 3.3 The 10 messages are:

WHAT WE NEED FROM PROFESSIONALS

1. ***Ask about how I am and my week, before going straight into bad stuff.***
2. ***I want you to listen to me and understand.***
3. ***Please keep me more informed about what is going on, and why.***
4. ***Think about my ambitions and support me to be able to try new experiences.***
5. ***A social worker is meant to make things better, please don't make me feel inferior.***
6. ***Please don't ask so many questions that aren't relevant.***
7. ***Be honest and sensitive with me.***
8. ***Talk to me about what I'd like concerning my life.***
9. ***Don't make any decisions without my opinion.***
10. ***Be a stable person in my life.***

- 3.4 These messages are being widely shared with other young people and with staff. They form an excellent basis for the standards we should adopt when working with children and young people in their interests.
- 3.5 The Children in Care Council is currently supported through the Leaving Care Service. The Council meets on a monthly basis and senior managers have attended regularly to hear their views. They also present to the Corporate Parenting Panel on a range of topics, including:
- Their experience of health care, particularly mental health services
 - Their experience of education and the Virtual School for Looked After Children
 - Leaving Care Services
 - Being an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
- 3.6 This direct feedback from young people at the Corporate Parenting Panel has been a very effective way of addressing issues. An example of this was the changes to arrangements for mental health services as a response to feedback that young people found it difficult to have to tell their story in more than one arena.
- 3.7 The Council's Independent Visitor Service provides volunteers who are available to visit and befriend children who do not have regular visits from a family member. 48 children are currently matched with Independent Visitors.
- 3.8 The Council commissions an Independent Advocacy Service from Barnardo's. This arrangement has been in place since 6th June 2016 when the new service took over from Coram Voice. The new service provides quarterly reports, which is a significant improvement over the previous arrangement. The first report covers the period from the start of the contract to December. During this time 26 children and young people have sought support from the advocacy service. The most common issues have been regarding placement and housing (24%) and financial issues (15%).
- 3.9 The new Division for Schools and Youth Engagement will be in place from 1st April 2017 and will lead on continuing to ensure that the voice of children and young people is clearly heard and understood at all levels. Section 13 of this report gives feedback on Practice Week, where senior managers sought and listened to the voice of children and young people on the service that they received. It was one of the most pleasing outcomes that young people reported that, in most cases, they felt that they were respected and listened to.

4. VISION FOR EARLY HELP AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

- 4.1 The refreshed Vision for our service has been developed in consultation with our staff and young people. It is a way of stating clearly what we want to achieve for the children and families we work with, and how we will go about doing that. We would hope that the Scrutiny Committee could sign up to the Vision. The Vision will only make a difference to the lives of the children and families we work with if we all take responsibility for putting it into practice.

4.2 **Our Vision**

Children and young people in Croydon will be safe, healthy, happy and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs.

What we will do to achieve this:

- Support families to care for their children where safe to do so
- Work with our partners to make sure that children, young people and families receive the right help at the right time when they experience difficulties
- Target our resources on those children with the highest levels of need
- Identify and manage risks to children and young people – and maximise family and community strengths to reduce impact of risk
- Work with children, young people and families, listen to their views, and be clear with each other about what needs to change
- Give our looked after children and young people the best opportunities to reach independence and support them into

Focus of Our Work

Practice

We will do the basics well and create conditions for good social work and family support to thrive – every child and family we work with will have an up to date assessment of their needs, a clear plan, purposeful interventions and regular review. Families should understand what our plan of work is, what we are aiming to achieve, what is expected of them and what they can expect of us.

We will work with families in a positive way so that they feel respected and valued, we encourage resilience and build on strengths.

Workforce

We will invest in our staff, train and support them through supervision and workforce development opportunities to be confident and capable professionals.

We aim to have a stable staff group, representative of the diverse community we serve, who are clear what is expected of them and proud of what they do.

We will support staff to have a manageable workload.

We will support our managers to lead and develop those who report to them.

Performance Management

We will use quality assurance and performance data to help us to understand demand so that we can target our resources on the most complex needs, be innovative, promote effectiveness of intervention (know what works), recognise and celebrate good practice and ensure compliance with best practice requirements.

Partnership working

We will work with our partners to put in place a strong Early Help Offer and multi-agency response to all concerns about children and families, be clear about who is eligible for our services and build capacity in the community to meet lower level needs.

We will support innovation in commissioning services, using all available sources of funding to develop services and make the most efficient and cost effective use of our resources.

- 4.3 The Vision has been circulated to staff and there will be further Launch sessions led by Cllr Flemming and the Executive Director of People later in March.

5. IMPROVEMENT BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 The Improvement Plan for Early Help and Children's Social Care has been developed in response to an assessment of current practice, including a number of external reviews of different parts of the service, including the Joint Targeted Area Inspection and is a tool to help Croydon Children's Social Care services and its partners to provide better services to children and families, and support them to achieve improved outcomes.
- 5.2 The Improvement Board was set up in September 2016 and is chaired by the Director of People. It includes representatives from Early Help and Children's Social Care services and the Lead Member for Children's Services is a member. The Board has the responsibility to drive and oversee progress on all elements of the Plan, and evidence impact. The Board reports to the Improvement Executive, which includes representatives from across the Council and ensures that all services are working together to achieve the corporate outcomes.
- 5.3 There are a number of ways we will evidence progress and demonstrate that we are making a difference and improving the services for children and young people.
- 5.3.1 **Performance Dashboard** – a set of indicators for each element of the Improvement Plan. The Performance Dashboard will be reported at each Improvement Board.
- 5.3.2 **Quality Assurance Framework** – this framework brings together evidence from a number of sources including audit, complaints and views of children and families to show that we are positively impacting on the quality of practice and the experience of children and young people.
- 5.3.3 **Monitoring, accountability and scrutiny arrangements** – the Improvement Board and Executive will be responsible for scrutiny and challenge.
- 5.3.4 **Peer challenge and external review** – a programme of review events will provide regular, external support and challenge.
- 5.3.5 **Service Planning** – improvement activity is embedded into all strategic planning, and progress is monitored.
- 5.3.6 **Stakeholder communication and engagement** – a communication and engagement strategy will outline the development of mechanisms including newsletters, website, briefings and workshops for both internal and external audiences. This will enable wider awareness and understanding of the progress made through the Improvement Plan

and engage key stakeholders so that they can be part of future developments and activity.

5.4 Croydon is committed to creating the right conditions to support professionals working across Early Help and Children's Social care to do their jobs well. This means ensuring access to continuing education and professional development, support, and reflective supervision. Croydon operates a model of systemic practice, which is supported by a comprehensive training programme, and Consultant Practitioners who work across the service and provide support, reflective supervision and practical tools for delivery of this approach which is aimed at understanding the context of families and their relationships in order to help them to change and flourish. The approach is supported by a Systemic Psychotherapist who provides individual and group consultation. Other tools are available for practitioners to do their work effectively and efficiently – these include:

- Membership of Research in Practice which gives practitioners access to a range of nationally developed tools and resources, and research information.
- Access to quality data and information, and regular feedback on performance against agreed indicators.
- The Quality Assurance Framework which provides practitioners with opportunity for audit feedback, messages from complaints, and from consultation with children and families.
- Regular opportunities for communication and exchange of information with senior managers.

5.5 There are six main work streams in the Improvement Plan. They are:

- Early Help
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and referral arrangements
- Quality of Practice, management oversight and supervision
- Quality Assurance and use of performance information
- Recruitment and retention of staff and workforce development
- Engagement and participation of children, young people and families

5.6 Each work stream has a summary of the context for the focus of work, our objectives, key actions and how we will monitor that we have been successful. A lead manager has been identified for each work stream, who will co-ordinate task groups, and report on progress to the Improvement Board.

6. JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION

6.1 The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), is conducted by a team of inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). The government launched the new system of inspection in February, and Croydon is amongst the first few authorities to have received one of these inspections.

- 6.2 All four inspectorates visited in May to look at how the Council, the Police, Health, Probation, Community Rehabilitation Company and Youth Offending Services are working together to identify, support and protect the borough's most vulnerable young people.
- 6.3 Inspectors spent a considerable amount of time observing the operation of the 'front door' (Croydon's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) to assess the effectiveness of practice and arrangements for identifying and managing the range of risks of harm to children and young people. Inspectors reviewed contacts and referrals to children's social care to ensure that children at risk of harm received timely identification and response.
- 6.4 Much of their work involved observing front-line practice in a range of settings, including the Police, Health and Children's Social Care, and inspectors visited services to assess the effectiveness of local services first hand. They also reviewed documents, case files and spoke directly to senior leaders in partner agencies to discuss the work they were doing to protect some of the most vulnerable children in Croydon.
- 6.5 The inspection included a 'deep dive' element, focusing on a small number of cases where children were missing from home, school or care or thought to be possibly at risk of child sexual exploitation. The Council was asked to work with partners to evaluate the experiences of five children selected by the lead inspector. This was done to assess the overall strengths of the practice and identify areas for development.
- 6.6 Inspectors published a joint report on 29 June 2016 which contained strengths and areas for improvement for all partners in Croydon. A summary of the findings are included below.

6.7 Overall findings

- 6.7.1 Inspectors' acknowledged Croydon's unique characteristics, for example, the high numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, high numbers of children placed by other local authorities in the borough, and increasing levels of deprivation. The borough also has the highest number of missing children in London.
- 6.7.2 The inspectors' overall findings included positive feedback about a number of aspects of service delivery and practice. This included recognition that all partners are working together effectively to meet the challenges of increasing demand and complexity in the local population.

- 6.7.3 It was also recognised that increasing demands for services are increasing pressure on partners to ensure there are sufficient resources to meet the needs, and in response the commissioning of a range of voluntary sector services was seen to be making a real difference to children and their families.
- 6.7.4 Inspectors' found that some aspects of multi-agency work are delivering well for children and young people. However in other areas, multi-agency and individual agency work requires improvement.

6.8 Strengths

An overview of some of the strengths identified in the inspection are included below:

- 6.8.1 The clear commitment from the Council and senior leaders across all partners to work together to support some of the most vulnerable children.
- 6.8.2 The Leader of the Council, Local Strategic Partnership and Local Safeguarding Children Board have prioritised CSE through a longstanding programme of work to increase awareness across the local area and strengthen the response to CSE.
- 6.8.3 Partners are working together effectively in many areas of practice to meet the challenges of increasing demand and complexity in Croydon.
- 6.8.4 Children missing and at risk of child sexual exploitation are supported by the Council through a wide range of voluntary agency specialist services, for example Safer London. This was seen to be making a real difference to children, young people and their families.
- 6.8.5 The work of Operation Raptor, a joint operation, involved the Council, Met police and NCA was praised for its ground-breaking work in helping to combat child sexual exploitation.
- 6.8.6 The report singled out 'highly effective practice' by the Council in relation to UASCs, for example the speed with which we find foster carers for UASCs when they present in Croydon, and in the thoroughness of age assessments.
- 6.8.7 The report recognised good work in health including the Case Reflection Model for GPs which allows cases to be considered in more depth and an innovative nationally recognised project to help protect women from female genital mutilation and to support victims in the borough.

6.8.8 The inspectors reported that the governance arrangements for the YOS are robust. There is evidence of effective management oversight of practice and, in particular, a clear focus on risk of harm to others, safeguarding and child sexual exploitation, so that YOS workers have a good understanding of risk and staff record this well.

6.9 Areas for improvement

The inspection also identified areas for improvement, a summary of the key areas are included below.

6.9.1 The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is experiencing high and increasing levels of demand. Inspectors found systems and capacity issues, and the inconsistent application of thresholds across partners means that there is not always a timely identification and assessment of children's needs.

6.9.2 The quality of contacts received by partners is variable and the time it takes to gather further information is contributing to delays in the timeliness of the response to children.

6.9.3 The quality of front line practice in various agencies is variable, particularly in cases where the risk is less immediate.

6.9.4 The local authority, police, health and probation services undertake analyses of the known cohort of children at risk of sexual exploitation, and this is driving the development of services to meet current needs and to prevent exploitation. However, the profiling of those who offend against children is underdeveloped.

6.9.5 Senior managers across the partnership, children's services, police, and health and probation services do not currently collate and use a full enough range of management information to help steer further improvements.

6.9.6 Inspectors found that the administration of the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE) requires improvements.

6.9.7 The high number of children placed in Croydon by other boroughs presents a challenge in terms of oversight, monitoring and analysis of patterns and trends of all children missing.

6.9.8 The quality of performance data received by the LSCB requires improvement in order that the Partnership can have effective oversight of all areas of practice, in particular in respect of the front door of services.

6.10 Response to findings

- 6.10.1 The Council and partners are committed to responding to the findings from the inspection, ensuring effective learning from the process and the implementation of the appropriate action needed. This includes delivering on the longer term strategic actions to improve services for children in Croydon as well as the short term actions needed. Good progress has been made and will continue.
- 6.10.2 The partners have developed a Joint Improvement Plan demonstrating the action they will be taking to respond to the findings from the inspection, which has been submitted to Ofsted.
- 6.10.3 The CSCB will also provide strategic oversight of the joint actions with partners which are need to deliver the plan. This will be monitored closely by the CSCB Executive.
- 6.10.4 The effective implementation of the improvement plan will be critical to achieving improvements in performance when Ofsted undertakes a wider, longer inspection of Children's Services under the Single Inspection Framework.

7. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- 7.1 The following paragraphs update the Committee on the key indicators from the CiN Census return and the SSDA903 return which reports on looked after children. These are the statutory returns that all authorities submit on an annual basis. The figures relate to 2015-16. These key indicators have been grouped under areas of improvement, areas of risk and challenges for each return. The challenges sections highlight areas of ongoing concern.
- 7.2 Croydon has the highest population of children and young people aged under 18 of all of the London boroughs. This cohort is continuing grow. This in itself is likely to be driving some of the increase in demand seen between 2014/15 and 2015/16 in terms of number of cases so rates have been used to make comparisons with other areas for historic data where possible.
- 7.3 The main headlines are:
- Demand for children's social services continues to increase.
 - There has been an increase in the reported percentage of children on a child protection plan for two years or more in 2015/16 (where the plan ceased within the year).
 - There have been improvements in placement stability for looked after children.

- There have been improvements around reported completion of health care assessments but there has been a decrease in reported completion of SDQ scores.
- There has been a decrease in the percentage of children adopted during 2015/16.

8. CiN CENSUS

8.1 Areas of improvement

8.1.1 100% of children who were subject to a child protection plan as at 31 March 2016 had been reviewed within the required timescales. This is an improvement on the previous year's figure of 99.6%.

8.2 Areas of risk

8.2.1 The number of referrals increased by 14% in 2015/16 compared to 2014/15. This is the second year that the number of referrals has increased. This has led to a significant increase in the rate of referrals.

8.2.2 The rate of children who were subject to a child protection plan as at 31 March 2016 was 39.0 per 10,000, a slight increase from the 31 March 2015 figure of 37. The national average for 31 March 2015 was 42.

8.2.3 The percentage of children who were subject to a second or subsequent plan has also slightly increased from 9.2% to 11.6%. Again the national average for 2014/15 was 16.6%, which, if national performance has remained fairly constant, may suggest that Croydon may still be below the national average for 2015/16.

8.3 Challenges

8.3.1 There was an increase in the rate of children in need per 10,000 children aged 0-17 from 400.8 as at 31 March 2015 to 430.6 as at 31 March 2016. This is a reverse of the previous downward trend. In 2014/15 we were ranked 104 out of 152 local authorities for the rate of CIN (with the local authority ranked 1 having the lowest rate). It is not clear how we compare against other local authorities for 2015/16 yet as this data has not been released, however our figure is similar to the 2014/15 figure for Sutton where the rate was 430.8, giving them a rank of 120.

8.3.2 There has been a significant increase in the percentage of referrals that resulted in no further action – from 6.7% in 2014/15 to 11.4% in 2015/16. Croydon had half the national average of NFAs in 2014/15, which was 13.8%; however it should be noted that the average figure quoted (which is the mean) was distorted by a number of authorities with high percentages of NFAs. The median figure was just below the Croydon score of 6.7%.

- 8.3.3 The percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days was 69.8%, similar to the previous year's figure of 69.6%. However latest figures show that performance in this area has improved and is now nearer 82%. The national average for 2015 was 81.5%.
- 8.3.4 However the percentage of children on a child protection plan for two years or more where the plan ceased during the year for 2015/16 was 8.2%, nearly double the figure for 2014/15, which was 4.3%. The Quality Assurance service are working closely with operational colleagues to review all cases where the plan for the child has been in place for more than eighteen months.

8.4 DATA SUMMARY

Table 3

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Rank	Quartile	Latest England Ave	2016
Children in Need - Rates per 10,000 (as at 31 March)	569.3	449.6	412.2	410.3	400.8	104	C	337.3	430.6
Number of referrals to Children's Social Services	-	4,177	4,135	3,516	4,196	-	-	635,600	4,775
Rates per 10,000 of referrals to Children's Social Services	-	468.2	459.4	384.4	454.4	-	-	548.3	516.8
Referrals to children's social care closed with no further action	-	7.6	9.6	6.8	6.7	75	C	13.8	11.4
% Continuous assessments for Children's Social Care carried out within 45 days	-	-	-	69.3	69.6	129	D	81.5	69.8
Rate of Children in Need who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March per 10,000 children	40.8	32.3	34.2	41.2	37.5	-	-	42.9	39.0
% Child Protection Plans which lasted 2 years or more	8.0	12.6	5.5	5.2	4.3	70	C	3.7	8.2%
% Second/Subsequent Child Protection Plans	5.2	13.3	10.9	13.9	9.2	12	A	16.6	11.6%
% Child Protection Cases reviewed within required timescales	98.7	98.2	99.5	99.6	99.6	30	A	94.0	100.0%

9. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – SSSDA903 RETURN

9.1 Areas of improvement

- 9.1.1 The percentage of looked after children placed more than 20 miles outside of their LA boundary dropped from 8.0% for 2015 to 6.0% in 2016 (as at 31 March). The national average for 2015/16 was 14.0%; however it should be noted that this average is affected by a number of factors including suitable accommodation in more rural areas and the need to place some children away from potential risks in the local area.
- 9.1.2 Both of the stability of placement key indicators showed an improvement. The percentage of looked after children with 3 or more placements in the year was 6.8%, much lower than the national average of 11.0% and a drop from the previous year's figure of 7.9%. The percentage of looked after children who had been looked after for more than 2.5 years and who had been in the same placement for more than 2 years also increased from 65.0% to 70%. The national average for 2016 was only 67%.
- 9.1.3 Both the reported percentage of looked after children convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand, and the reported percentage of looked after children having a substance misuse issue, fell between 2015 and 2016. These figures are both lower than the national averages for 2016.
- 9.1.4 There has been a significant increase in the reported percentage of looked after children with up-to-date health assessments, from 76.5% to 85.0%. There was a substantial increase for looked after children aged under 5 with an up-to-date health assessment from 72.0% to 93.0%.
- 9.1.5 The reported percentage of looked after children missing from care dropped from 3.0% in 2015 to 2.0% in 2016; this means the Croydon figure continues to be below the national average, which in 2016 was 6.0%. The reported percentage of looked after children away from placement without authorisation also remained low, staying at 1.0%. The national average is 3.0%.
- 9.1.6 The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training in 2016 was 60.0%, the same as the previous year. This remains well above the national average of 48.0%.
- 9.1.7 The percentage of children placed more than 20 miles from the authority is significantly better than national averages. Given the numbers of looked after children in Croydon, this is a considerable achievement.

9.2 Areas of development

- 9.2.1 There was a slight increase in both the number of children who started to be looked after during 2015/16 and the number of children who were continuously looked after for at least 12 months during the year, compared to the figures for 2014/15. However the number of children who ceased to be looked after also went up.
- 9.2.2 The percentage of children who had had their cases reviewed within statutory timescales dropped from 86% in 2015 to 82% in 2016.
- 9.2.3 Although the average SDQ score for looked after children as at 31 March 2016 was lower than the previous year's figure, 10.1 compared to 11.2, the percentage of looked after children with a recorded SDQ score (for those who had been looked after continuously for 12 months or more) also fell from 83.0% to 70.0%. The national average for the percentage of looked after children with a SDQ score is not available for 2016; however in 2015 this was 72.0%.
- 9.2.4 The percentage of looked after children with up to date dental checks fell from 95.3% in 2015 to 87.0% in 2016. However, the percentage of looked after children with up to date immunisations remained the same as the previous year (92.4% in 2016 compared to 92.5% in 2015).
- 9.2.5 The percentage of care leavers for whom Croydon does not have any information fell from 19.8% in 2015 to 18.0% in 2016. This remains higher than the national average of 17.0%.

9.3 Challenges

- 9.3.1 The rate of looked after children as at 31 March 2016 was 87 per 10,000 children aged under 18, the same as for 31 March 2015. This rate includes the high number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children looked after by Croydon. The national average for 2016 was 60 looked after children per 10,000 children aged under 18.
- 9.3.2 The percentage of children who were adopted fell from 8.0% in 2014/15 to 3.9% in 2015/16. This is significantly below the national average for 2015/16 of 17%. However it should be noted that the high number of looked after children in Croydon means it is difficult to compare these percentage figures. Croydon's performance historically has been closer to the regional average for London, which has remained significantly lower than the national average for the past few years.
- 9.3.3 The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation remained at 77% in 2016, below the national average of 81.0%.

9.4 Data Summary

Table 4

	2015	2016	Latest England Ave as @ 10th March 2016	Polarity	Direction of Travel and RAG Rating Compared to 2015
Rate per 10,000 of children looked after aged under 18 years (as at 31 March)	87	87	60	Lower is better	→
No. of children who started to be looked after, yr ending 31 March	400	408	TBC	Lower is better	↑
No. of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months as at 31 March	495	511	TBC	Lower is better	↑
No. of children who ceased to be looked after, yr ending 31 March	385	415	TBC	Higher is better	↑
Adoption - % of children looked after adopted during the yr ending 31 March	8.0	3.9	17.0	Higher is better	↓
Stability of Placements - % with 3 or more placements in year	7.9	6.8	11.0	Lower is better	↓
Stability of Placements - % looked after for at least 2.5 yrs and in same placement for at least 2 yrs	65.0	70.0	67.0	Higher is better	↑
Case Handling - % of children whose cases had been reviewed within statutory time limits (CF/C68) (former NI 66)	86.0	82.0	TBC	Higher is better	↓
% of children looked after at 31 March, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary	8.0	6.0	14.0	Lower is better	↓
Crime - % of children looked after (aged 10+) convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	6.0	5.8	5.0	Lower is better	↓
Drugs - % of children looked after identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year	2.0	1.8	4.0	Lower is better	↓
% LAC with SDQs Recorded	83.0	70.0	TBC	Higher is better	↓

	2015	2016	Latest England Ave as @ 10th March 2016	Polarity	Direction of Travel and RAG Rating Compared to 2015
Average SDQ Score	11.2	10.1	TBC	Lower is better	↓
% LAC with up to date Health Assessments	76.5	85.0	TBC	Higher is better	↑
% LAC Age 5 and Under with up to date Health Assessments	72.0	93.0	TBC	Higher is better	↑
% LAC with up to date Dental Checks	95.3	87.0	TBC	Higher is better	↓
% LAC with up to date Immunisations	92.5	92.4	TBC	Higher is better	→
% Looked after Children Missing from Care	3.0	2.0	6.0	Lower is better	↓
% Looked after Children Away from Placement without Authorisation	1.0	1.0	3.0	Lower is better	→
Care Leavers - Suitable Accommodation (at age 19, 20 & 21 from 2014)	77.0	77.0	81.0	Higher is better	→
% of Care Leavers age 19, 20 & 21 the local authority does not have information on	19.8	18.0	17.0	Lower is better	↓
Care Leavers - Education, Employment or Training (at age 19, 20 & 21 from 2014)	60.0	60.0	48.0	Higher is better	→

10. EARLY HELP

- 10.1 In this section of the report, a summary of information is provided regarding the recent progress that has been made. It is important to recognise that Early Help is a partnership activity and the Council is often not the main delivery agency. It is clearly important that children and families receive the support that they need as early as possible in order to prevent more serious and potentially damaging problems developing later.
- 10.2 Croydon has a well-established four stage intervention approach – using the ‘wedge’ model - to provide appropriate and proportionate support for children and families. In some cases this is provided directly through the Council but in the majority of cases the support will be provided by partner agencies, potentially with the advice and co-ordination of Council officers.
- 10.3 Croydon’s Early Help Assessment (EHA) Form was reviewed and revised to become a family assessment and has been in place from September 2014. The form is available electronically and is part of the integrated ICT system Liquid Logic.
- 10.4 The Early Help Pathways Guidance was revised in 2014, and was agreed by the Safeguarding Children’s Board. This includes the Threshold document. This document has been refreshed and updated in January 2017.
- 10.5 The main components of Council run Early Help Services are as follows:-
- 10.5.1 **Early Help Hub** – point of coordination of Early Help Assessments, advice and signposting and referral to Council run Early Help services. Within the Early Help Hub, Early Help Coordinators operate a duty system to ensure enquiries and referrals are dealt with in a timely manner, practitioners are advised appropriately by experienced team members, and effective screening and assessment take place where families do not have an identifiable lead professional. The Early Help Hub aligns with the MASH, contributing to the MASH intelligence function, with opportunity for close liaison and daily professional discussion on cases. There is in place a step up and down process.
- 10.5.2 **Best Start Family Intervention and Support Service- (0-5)** fully implemented in 2016, with support from key partners. Best Start brings together midwives, health visitors, children’s centres, Family Nurse Partnership (FNP), family support, social care, mental health and other key services into blended teams, working with families with children under five years. The Best Start workforce is being trained in the Family Partnership Model and receives joint group supervision in order to further develop consistency.
- 10.5.3 **Family Resilience Service (FRS)** – National Troubled Families initiative in Croydon.

- 10.5.4 **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** – evidence based programme of intervention aimed at diverting young people from the care and criminal justice systems.
- 10.5.5 **Youth and Play community engagement and specialist programmes (11-19)** – Targeted community outreach and youth service.
- 10.5.6 **Youth Offending Service (YOS)** – statutory multi agency service for children and young people involved in offending.
- 10.5.7 **Family Justice Centre (FJC)** – universal access advice service for victims of domestic abuse.
- 10.6 Not all areas of Council early intervention services are located within the Early Intervention Service. Notably, school improvement, educational psychology and educational welfare services are commissioned through a mutual – Octavo. Social work and education services for children with disabilities and Special Educational Needs (SEN) are located within an all age disability service.
- 10.7 Croydon has made a successful bid for DCLG funding in relation to domestic abuse services. The funded service is in partnership with LB Bexley and LB Bromley and will focus on
- Increasing turnover within the refuge spaces to enable more women in need to be supported within existing spaces.
 - Providing continuity in support from access to refuge until 6 months after move-on, to enable more effective support, improved safety and reduced repeat stays in refuge.
 - Providing bespoke support for BME women with NRPF and EEA migrant women to increase accessibility of services for these groups and a better, tailored provision.
 - Offering an innovative partnership model of local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to enhance co-operation, peer support and shared knowledge.
- 10.8 Early help work is currently overseen through the Early Help Board, which reports to the Children and Family Partnership. The provision of early help services is a priority area for the Partnership. As will be referenced in the section below, it is now agreed that the governance of Early Help work will sit under that of the Safeguarding Children’s Board. This is in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance 2015 and will allow a stronger alignment with other partnership arrangements for children to give continuity of oversight.
- 10.9 In November 2016, the Director of Children’s Services commissioned an external review of the early help offer in Croydon. This was undertaken by Alison Murphy, who has previously worked as a Director of Children’s Services in other authorities. The review identified a number of strengths in the current offer, but made the following recommendations:

- Develop clear governance arrangements and a shared vision for early help services between CSCB and Children and Families partnership.
- Reconfigure early help to reduce duplication and improve systems, within a whole system approach to service delivery.
- Develop an early help strategy that clearly articulates the early help offer for children and families across the lifecycle, including transition.
- Streamline assessment and referral processes to ensure reduction in duplication, early identification and provision of timely supportive interventions, as part of the MASH improvement programme.
- Engage partners fully, particularly schools and the voluntary sector to improve integration of service delivery.
- Develop a coherent strategy for the engagement of children and families and how their voice shapes service provision.
- Review whether further integration of commissioning arrangements can reduce duplication and maximise impact of scarce resources on outcomes for children.
- CSCB to review thresholds document and training to reflect recent changes to services, and build better understanding across all agencies on the operation of thresholds.
- Develop a strong multi layered communication strategy as part of the improvement programme to strengthen engagement of all stakeholders.
- Put in place a quality assurance framework that systematically pulls together evidence from data analysis and practice quality evaluation to measure quality and impact across the whole system.

10.10 In the light of the review, a number of actions have already taken place. The Early Help Improvement Plan has been developed to take forward all of the recommendations and reports to the Improvement Board.

11. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- 11.1 Having a strong and stable workforce is a key part of the overall improvement plan as it is key to achieving our ambitions. This is why the recruitment and retention of social workers forms one of the work streams and we are refreshing our recruitment and retention strategy.
- 11.2 The National Minimum Data Set is undertaken by every Local Authority on an annual basis. This gives information on our overall retention rates and the numbers of agency staff as a proportion of our overall workforce.
- 11.3 The turnover rate for permanent social work staff was 15.0% in 2015-16. This is higher than the previous year of 11.9%, but it remains below the London average. The number of staff who have completed exit interviews is low and this does not give us good information about the reasons for staff leaving.
- 11.4 The vacancy rate is 20.5%. The overall number of agency staff is higher than this because we needed to recruit additional social work staff to manage increased demand in the number of Children in Need and in the rising number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. This means that we have had to recruit some supernumary staff.

- 11.5 The areas of the service where there are high rates of vacancies are:
- Assessment
 - Care Planning and Child Protection
- 11.6 Across the Service there are high numbers of permanent managers at all levels. This is not the case in the Assessment service, although positively the managers that have been employed through agency have remained and formed a stable management team.
- 11.7 The market to permanently recruit experienced social work staff remains very challenging across London. In the Spring of 2016, the Council ran two parallel recruitment campaigns, one for experienced staff and one for newly qualified social workers (NQSW). There was a very limited response to the former, leading to the recruitment of one social worker. We have been more successful in encouraging agency staff to become permanent than through general advertisement, especially within the Looked After Children Service. The campaign to recruit NQSWs was very successful. There were more than 100 applications leading to 26 offers of employment. This meant that we were in the position of only recruiting the very best applicants. In addition, the second cohort of Frontline students all passed their first year, so that we had an additional 12 new starters during the Autumn.
- 11.8 The number of NQSWs is very positive for the future of the Division. It does place some additional burdens on the current staff and managers. NQSW staff have an assessed and supported first year (ASYE) of employment, during which they receive additional support and a reduced caseload. The Council does receive a Central Government grant per student to assist us with this. The Division has retained some supernumary locum staff to manage this process and ensure that caseloads are manageable. This is still cheaper than maintaining the previous level of locum staff. As the year progresses, the NQSW staff will gain in confidence and experience and will steadily be able to assume greater levels of responsibility.
- 11.9 The level of caseloads can vary depending on the part of the service. The most basic way of calculating caseloads is by the number of children allocated to a particular social worker. However, it is relevant to understand the number of families that a social worker is allocated to, and there are differences in the level of complexity. According to the National Minimum Data Set, the average caseload nationally is 16.1 children per qualified social worker. The average in Croydon was 17.3. This will vary according to the different parts of the service.

12. CHILD'S JOURNEY

- 12.1 The structure of Children's Social Care reflects the different functions that social workers undertake. We are currently reviewing our structures to reduce the number of internal transfers that children and their families will experience. The processes are complex and the account below will only represent a summary of the main work routes.

- 12.2 Initial referrals are overseen through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Cases are not allocated to an individual social worker during this process. If the MASH recommends that a social work assessment is required they will pass this through to the Assessment Service. The exception to this will be where the child has a disability. In these cases, the child assessment will be undertaken by the 0-25 Children with Disabilities Service. Performance figures on the source of referrals will be given in Section 14.
- 12.3 There are five social work units within the Assessment Service. They will be on duty for a week at a time on a rota basis. The unit that is on duty will start the assessments passed through from the MASH. The target for assessments is 45 working days. At the completion of the assessment the social worker will make a recommendation for how best to meet the child's needs. If the initial concern from the MASH was that a child protection assessment was required, the investigation will need to be on a shorter time scale than this. If a Child Protection Case Conference is required, then this should take place within 15 working days of the process being initiated.
- 12.4 If the recommendation is that an ongoing social work service is required, either as a Child in Need plan, or as a Child Protection Plan, the case will be allocated in the Care Planning service. There are eight social work Units within the two Care Planning service areas. There is no geographical allocation of cases. Two of the Units are dedicated to working with teenagers and are referred to as Young People's Units. The Care Planning Service also manages the majority of applications to the Family Courts and the Private Fostering Service.
- 12.5 If the child becomes looked after and the plan for them is to remain looked after, the case will be transferred to the Permanence Service. The Permanence 2 service will work with local looked after children and their main focus of work is to establish a long term plan to ensure stability for the child. This may take place at the end of the assessment process if the child has become looked after during that time. This may mean working to ensure that a plan for adoption or Special Guardianship is achieved. Children who present as Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers are referred directly to Permanence 1 service area. This service will then continue to work with the child until they transfer to the Leaving Care Service.
- 12.6 The Leaving Care Service works with young people from the age of 18 until our legal responsibility for them under the Children (Leaving Care) Act ceases. Currently this is at age 21 unless the young person remains in full time education, in which case our duty to them continues until the age of 25.
- 12.7 Additionally, within the Looked After Children and Resources Service, there are specific service areas for Fostering, for Business Relations (which identifies and quality assures the placements for looked after children) and the Adoption Service.

13. PRACTICE WEEK

- 13.1 The Children's Social Care Leadership Team (CLT) undertook their first Practice Week in October 2016. The purpose of Practice Week was to support quality assurance of social work and influence front-line practice by facilitating reflection. During this week CLT audited 99 cases, spoke to social workers, managers, foster carers and other professional partners. CLT observed supervision, core groups, LAC reviews, child protection conferences and spoke to children and families about the quality of service they had received. All case audits were undertaken alongside the social worker or practitioner, and managers were regularly involved. Practice Week therefore provided detailed information about the quality of practice across all parts of Early Help and Children's Social Care with additional comment on joint work with Youth Offending Services.
- 13.2 Practice Week discovered that overwhelmingly social workers and practitioners know risks, strengths and protective factors in their cases. There are excellent examples of direct work with children and parents. In a significant number of cases practitioners have a plan of intervention in place for how we will help children and families. A large number of children, families and partners know what those plans are and their role in those plans. There were also examples of outcome focused planning, however the quality of planning processes across the system are inconsistent. A further challenge was the drift and delay in social work cases often caused by changes in social worker or internal transfer processes. Changes in staff (managers and practitioners) was identified as a primary factor impeding the quality of practice in Croydon.
- 13.3 The findings from Practice Week have informed our Children's Social Care Improvement Plan which includes actions to improve the quality of practice and recruitment and retention of social workers. The next Practice Week will be held in May 2017 which will provide further evidence on the quality of social work practice in Croydon.

14. MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)

- 14.1 The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the Local Authority's 'front door' to manage all child protection referrals and to consider the most appropriate support available for families in need of help. The aim of Croydon's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is to provide safer outcomes for children, who are referred to them. The MASH is made up of co-located staff from Children's Social Care, Police Public Protection Desk, Health, Education, Youth Offending Service, Early Intervention and Support Services, Youth Services and Probation. The MASH take referrals Monday to Friday, 09:00 - 17:00 and is based in Bernard Weatherill House.
- 14.2 The Joint Targeted Area Inspection specifically looked at the operation of the MASH and made a number of recommendations. These have been referenced above in Section 6. One of the recommendations following the Inspection was to undertake a review of the operation of the MASH. This was initially undertaken in August 2016 and made very similar observations to the Inspection Team.

- 14.3 A number of actions have been undertaken to increase the capacity of the MASH to manage the volume of contacts that they receive from partners and from the public. We have increased the number of managers to ensure that there is management oversight. This has greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of dealing with contacts and referrals in a timely manner.
- 14.4 We have improved the quality of performance information. A monthly dashboard is shared with managers from all agencies giving a range of activity indicators within the service.
- 14.5 Senior managers are also able to use 'real time' information on the workflow of contacts and referrals. They undertake monthly audits on contacts where there is a recommendation for 'no further action.'
- 14.6 The further development and structure of the MASH is overseen through the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement Board and through the Safeguarding Children's Board through the oversight of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection Action Plan.
- 14.7 Table 5 shows the source of contacts to the MASH in the current year to December. This forms one section of the overall MASH data base. As can be seen, the largest source of contacts is the Police. This is due to the number of contacts the Police have with members of the community where a child is present. This will include calls regarding domestic abuse. We are also working on a more precise record of the source of those contacts currently showing as 'Other'. Overall, we are continuing to work with partners to reduce the number of contacts that result in no further action.

Table 5

Contact Source Type	Total April – December 2016	Percentage
Anonymous	65	0.3%
Health services – A&E (Emergency Department)	388	2.2%
Health services - GP	257	1.3%
Health services – Health Visitor	60	0.3%
Health services - Other	1,242	6.6%
Health services – Other primary health services	267	1.3%
Health services – School Nurse	4	0%
Home Office	20	0.1%
Housing (LA housing or housing association)	49	0.3%
Individual - Acquaintance	9	0%
Individual - Family member/relative/carer	928	5.0%
Individual - Other (including strangers, MPs)	40	0.2%
Individual - Self	428	2.3%
LA Services - External	1,419	7.6%
LA services - Other internal department	823	4.4%
LA services - Social care	404	2.2%
Not Recorded	708	3.8%
NSPCC	102	0.5%
Other	2,414	13.0%
Other legal agency	1,964	10.6%
Police	5,014	27.0%

Probation	287	1.5%
Schools	1,710	9.2%
Unknown	10	0%
Grand Total	18,614	

15. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 15.1 As of the middle of February 2017 there are 813 children in Croydon's care. These children are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) (402) and local children (411).
- 15.2 As of the end of January 2017 this amounted to 87 of every 10,000 of Croydon's children are in the care of the Local Authority. This is higher than the national average of 60 per 10,000 as might be expected given that Croydon has a much higher than average number of UASC in our care.
- 15.3 For reference, at the end of April 2016, there were 821 children in Croydon's care: 386 were local children and 435 were UASC. That amounted to 89 children in care per 10,000 of the population.
- 15.4 There are 603 boys and 210 girls in our care as of mid-February 2017. Boys outnumber girls in both populations but the difference is much greater in the UASC population. There are 178 local girls and 32 female UASC in our care and 233 local boys and 370 male UASC.
- 15.5 We currently have no children identifying as transgender or non binary.
- 15.6 The legal status of our looked after children breaks down like this:
- All of our UASC are identified as being in our care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Of the local children in our care, 113 are in care under Section 20. Of those, 59 are aged 16 or 17. This is relevant as young people of those ages can, under normal circumstances, consent to their being in our care.
- 15.7 Of the 54 young people aged up to and including 15 years old who are in our care under section 20, records show that eight are children with disabilities. The vast majority of the remainder have a care plan which either involves a return home to parents or care proceedings to afford the Local Authority legal parental responsibility.
- 15.8 There are currently two young people in our care under Section 25 of the Children Act. This involved the use of secure accommodation to safeguard their welfare.
- 15.9 At the end of January 2017 there were 8 young people remanded into custody which automatically makes them looked after children regardless of whether they were looked after prior to the remand. Two of the 8 had been in our care before their remand period and a further four had received as service as a child in need.

- 15.10 Where looked after children are sentenced to custody, they technically only retain their status as looked after if they are the subject of a Care Order. In Croydon, we treat all children who were looked after prior to their sentence as being looked after throughout their sentence unless or until an assessment deems that this is not necessary. There are 15 looked after or former looked after children serving a custodial sentence. Eleven of those were looked after only because they were remanded. The remaining four were the subjects of Section 31 Care Orders or had been looked after under Section 20 prior to the remand period.
- 15.11 In 2015 Sir James Munby, the president of the Family Division of the High Court, expressed concern about the misuse of Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This was followed by practice guidance from the Association of Directors of Children's Services in conjunction with CAF/CASS. Sir James Munby asserted that some Local Authorities were not obtaining informed consent from parents. He also explained that some Local Authorities were denying children the opportunity for legal and physical permanence by avoiding care proceedings and allowing children to remain subject to Section 20 for extended periods of time.
- 15.12 The ADCS responded to this view and asserted that there are circumstances when it is appropriate for children to be in Local Authority care for periods of time.
- 15.13 We responded to this in Croydon by formally reviewing at senior management level all of the cases for children who are in care under Section 20 and are aged 15 or younger. The intention was to identify possible drift in care planning and to support first line managers to address this drift. This was in addition to usual case planning and supervision processes.
- 15.14 Additionally, we supported staff with a new protocol for the use of Section 20. This effectively requires staff to be considering permanent plans for our children at the earliest possible stage of the case management.
- 15.15 There are currently 81 separate families in care proceedings. Each family has between one and four children. All of these children will either be the subjects of a Section 20 agreement or an Interim Care Order under Section 38 of the Children Act 1989.
- 15.16 241 of the children who are in our care were subject to CP plans earlier in their life. 120 were subject to Child In Need Plans prior to becoming looked after.
- 15.17 Of the children who are in care under Section 20 who are local, 53 have been in our care for less than a year. Of those 53, twenty-four children are aged 15 or younger.
- 15.18 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children ('UASC')** - The London Borough of Croydon is in a unique national position with regard to UASC due to the presence of The United Kingdom Visa and Immigration Department offices within the Borough. This means that all children and young people making a direct presentation to that office are designated as Children in Need within our

area according to Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. If they require to be looked after children, and the vast majority of them do, then this is the responsibility of this Local Authority. For many years, this has placed a major additional responsibility upon the Council and on other local services.

- 15.18.1 In May 2016, Croydon was the subject of a Joint Targeted Area Inspection by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMI Constabulary and HMI Probation. Part of the Inspection was to look at our arrangements for managing new referrals to services and there was a specific look at the reception arrangements for UASC. The Inspectors were very impressed with the quality of the work that they oversaw and this was mentioned as an area of highly effective practice in their letter following the Inspection.
- 15.18.2 There are 402 UASC in care in Croydon as of the middle of February 2017. Of these, 249 are aged 16 or 17 years old and came into our care at a younger age.
- 15.18.3 The table below shows the number of UASC children over the past five years as at 31st March.

Table 6

Year	Number
2012	335
2013	305
2014	365
2015	410
2016	433

- 15.18.4 It can be seen that the overall numbers have been increasing over the past four years, having experienced a lower number. The number increased by May 2016 to 445.
- 15.18.5 The age profile of looked after UASC in September 2016 was as follows:

Table 7

Age	Number
Under 13	5
13	16
14	34
15	78
16	145
17	167

- 15.18.6 The current picture (mid-February 2017) is as follows:

Table 8

Age	Number
Under 13	0
13	9
14	26

15	73
16	128
17	166

15.18.7 Croydon has had a long standing agreement with other London authorities to share the overall burden of placement of UASC children through the Pan-London Rota. This agreement means that children who present to UKVI as being aged 16 or 17 are distributed on a rota basis across London authorities other than Hillingdon (who have Heathrow within their area).

15.18.8 During 2015-16, 430 children were distributed in this way. From October to December 2016 there were 78 children distributed this way, though this number does not account for the UASC who present directly to those Local Authorities. This means that the vast majority of UASCs in Croydon are claiming ages of 15 and under at the time that they become looked after. This means that they must be placed in foster care rather than semi-independent provision.

15.18.9 The placement type for UASC looked after in May 2016.

Table 9

Type	Number
Residential Unit	0
Foster Care	389
Semi-Independent Accommodation	56
Secure Accommodation or Prison	0

15.18.10 The current picture (February 2017) for placement types is as follows:

Table 10

Type	Number
Residential Unit	0
Foster Care	362
Semi-Independent Accommodation	40
Secure Accommodation or Prison	0

15.18.11 The core social work service comes from Permanence 1 Delivery Area. This is a dedicated service of four Units of social workers. The service operates a separate duty service to manage new referrals from the UKVI.

15.18.12 UASC children are offered the same level of social work service as that offered to local looked after children. They are subject to the same legislative and regulatory framework. They are allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer and will have their case and their Care Plan reviewed in the same way as local children. Clearly, they are unlikely to have family members available to them. They have access to the Independent Visiting Service and Independent Advocates.

15.19 Fostering - We have 249 fostering households within the in-house Croydon Fostering Service. Currently, 404 young people are placed in in-house

provision. Additionally there are 45 connected persons carers, most of who care for one or two children previously known to them.

- 15.19.1 This is the largest fostering service in London and in the future may be able to support a higher percentage of Croydon's looked after children if the number of UASC reduces as anticipated.
- 15.19.2 Foster carers have their own social worker responsible for their supervision, and are reviewed annually. As per regulatory requirement, annual reviews after the first year of fostering are presented to the Fostering Panel. Thereafter, annual reviews are overseen by the management team of the Fostering Service.
- 15.19.3 The Fostering Service is supported by a robust Fostering Panel which is independently chaired as is required. The chair and members of the Panel are also subject to annual review. This review is currently being overseen by a manager in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service within Children's Social Care.
- 15.19.4 During October 2016, managers in Children's Social Care undertook a number of audits of children's cases over a 'Practice Week'. This included meeting children, their families and carers as well as meeting professionals and reviewing the case file. Foster carers generally fed back a positive message that they felt well supported by their supervising social workers.

15.20 Adoption - Adoption removes legal parental responsibility from the child's parents entirely. The legislation guides courts to do so only when it is *required* to do so in order to safeguard the child's welfare (unless the parents actively consent to adoption) and that it is accepted that in most circumstances children have better outcomes within their family of origin and have a right to family life as described by Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

- 15.20.1 The number of children who ceased to be looked after and were adopted in 2014-15 was 30. The number for 2015-16 dropped to 16. To date this year (2016 -17) there have been 19 Adoption Orders made. As at mid-February there were 10 children placed for Adoption, 3 children matched but not yet placed, 7 with a placement order but not yet matched and 15 with a decision that they should be placed for adoption and awaiting placement orders (legal order to place with adopters).
- 15.20.2 The percentage of Croydon's children who were adopted fell from 8.0% in 2014-15 to 3.9% in 2015-16. This is significantly below the national average for 2015/16 of 17%. However it should be noted that the high number of looked after children in Croydon means it is difficult to compare these percentage figures. Croydon's performance historically has been closer to the regional average for London, which has remained significantly lower than the national average for the past few years.
- 15.20.3 Nationally the number of new decisions that a child should be placed for adoption has fallen year on year. This amounted to a decrease between 2013 and 2016 of 42%. National figures for 2016-7 are not yet available.
- 15.20.4 This decrease may be explained a number of ways. Widely discussed is the

impact of case law known as Re-B and Re B-S, heard in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal respectively, in Autumn 2013. As a result Sir James Munby, the President of the Family Division, reminded the judiciary and related professionals of the expectation that a child will be placed for adoption only when it is required to do so in order to safeguard their welfare. In other words, '*nothing else will do*'. The President later expressed concern that this is being interpreted as '*everything else must be considered*'. In practice, Judges are reluctant to make Placement Orders unless they are satisfied that extended family have been properly considered and parents have been given every opportunity to engage. According to regulation, the Court cannot make a Placement Order without a decision from the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption, ratifying the social work plan that the child be placed for Adoption. This in fact serves as a safeguard and quality assurance function as well as a formal decision.

- 15.20.5 Croydon's percentage rate of adoption (4% in 2015 -16) is much lower than the national average (17%). This measures the number of children adopted as a percentage of the overall looked after population. It is noted that while this figure dramatically improves if only local children, rather than UASC, are considered, it is still below the national average.
- 15.20.6 There were 19 approved adopters awaiting for a match as at September 2016. The number of adopters approved fell from the previous year. This is because we made a strategic decision at that time not to recruit mainstream adopters who are more likely to want to parent babies and children with straightforward needs. Instead we purchased adopters and mobilised our already approved and waiting adopters given the significant increase in approvals rates nationally. We have recently begun recruiting again.
- 15.20.7 Nationally, registrations to become adopters have decreased by 13% from 840 in quarter 4 (January – March) 2015-16 to 730 in quarter 1 (April – June) 2016-17.
- 15.20.8 It remains a challenge to secure adoptive families for children who have complex needs and/or disabilities, sibling groups and children from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME). Therefore, our recruitment strategy is targeted at improving our performance in these areas.
- 15.20.9 We will also be focusing on recruiting Foster to Adopt carers. These are approved adopters who have a dual approval to foster a child and subsequently adopt the child when the Local Authority is granted an order to place for adoption. In 2016-17 three adopters became foster to adopt carers from the previous year of one adopter.
- 15.20.10 The action plan will be to further develop this model through partnership with Coram BAAF and TACT, through the Regionalisation agenda and through internal recruitment. Coram BAAF has been commissioned to provide training and professional advice to enable further the development of the Fostering for Adoption model. TACT will provide training and professional advice on targeted recruitment for BME adopters and the Regionalisation agenda will in future provide the platform to secure a much more diverse range of approved adopters targeted at placing more hard to place children in adoptive homes.

This resource will be closely aligned to our pool of existing in house foster carers approved and waiting to ensure babies and toddlers who become LAC are placed with foster to adopt carers to avoid multiple moves and achieve stability early on.

- 15.20.11 Significant improvements have been made since 2010 in the average time it takes between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family from 2 years or 738 days over 3 year average to end of 2015, to 468 days 2015-16 and a further improvement to Sept 2016 to 402 days which is below the DfE threshold of 487 days.

16. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

- 16.1 Croydon serves an extremely diverse community. The figures below (Table 11) show the current figures in relation to the general population as taken from the most recent Census. The figures for looked after children do include Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and this does affect the figures.

16.2 Table 11

Ethnicity	General Population	Children on Child Protection Plans	Children Looked After
White	42.60%	38.4%	42.2%
Black African and Black Caribbean	26.10%	27.5%	23.4%
Mixed Parentage	13.30%	18.9%	9.1%
Asian	15.30%	9.6%	0.7%
Chinese and Other	2.50%	0.3%	5.5%

- 16.3 It can be seen that there is an over representation of children from mixed parentage backgrounds within the child protection arena. The number of white children who are looked after is affected by the considerable proportion of Albanian children who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and without those, they would be under-represented as a proportion of the overall population. This is also a feature on the apparent over-representation of Chinese and other children as a proportion of the looked after children population.

17. MISSING CHILDREN

- 17.1 Croydon continues to have the highest number of children reported missing of any London authority. This is a total figure and it should be remembered that Croydon has the highest population of young people of any London authority. Nevertheless, this is a significant issue and is affected by the large number of

looked after children placed within the Authority, both those looked after by Croydon and those placed within Croydon by other Local Authorities.

- 17.2 Some of these issues have been referred to in Section 6 of this report as missing children were one of the features of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection.
- 17.3 Overall, in 2015-16, there were 2277 reports of children being missing to the police in Croydon. These referred to 457 separate individuals. Of these, 55% were children looked after by LB Croydon, 21% were children looked after by other authorities and 24% were regarding children living at home. Looked after children are generally more likely to be reported as missing than children living at home.
- 17.4 Croydon commissions the NSPCC to undertake return home interviews. All children should receive a return home interview from a professional independent of where they live. The NSPCC service is aimed at those assessed as being most at risk. 237 children were offered this service in 2015-16 and 111 agreed to take up the opportunity. This gives very helpful information on the reasons that young people are going missing and the level of risk to which they are exposing themselves.
- 17.5 A multi-agency panel meets to discuss plans for children who are reported missing and how they should be located.
- 17.6 Information is circulated on a daily basis to managers within the Children's Social Care Service on all children currently recorded as missing. The Quality Assurance Manager for CSE and Missing undertakes a six weekly summary report that is also available to senior managers across the Division and to the DCS.
- 17.7 Services for children who go missing remain one of the key parts of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection Improvement Plan.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: In Care, Out of Trouble, available at:
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/In%20care%20out%20of%20trouble%20summary.pdf>