



Roadmap to Excellence

for Children's Social Care



THE LONDON BOROUGH

By working together with agency partners, we will ensure that every child in Bromley has the right help at the right time to keep them safe, and to meet their needs, so that they achieve, thrive and reach their full potential.

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Foreword



In January 2017, we published the *Roadmap to Excellence*, a document outlining our vision for children's services in Bromley.

Although the Roadmap was ambitious, it clearly set out the direction of travel for children's services over the last two years, articulating our commitment to improving outcomes for our children, young people, their carers and families.

In November 2018, we were delighted when Ofsted reviewed the overall effectiveness of our children's services and validated our hard work over the last two years, confirming we provide 'Good' services with 'Outstanding' social work leadership. As you know, I believe that every single member of staff in children's services is a leader in their own right and this is an achievement that we all share.

While we should be proud and celebrate our collective efforts, our improvement journey continues into the next phase of our "*Roadmap to Excellence*", working towards delivering 'Outstanding' services for our children and young people.

***Roadmap to Excellence* improvement themes**

The previous *Roadmap to Excellence* document identified 8 key themes, which have now been streamlined and realigned against the overarching themes identified in the Ofsted inspection framework for local authority children's services:

Experience and progress of children who need help and protection

1. Improving safeguarding practice to provide better help and protection

2. Improving practice for vulnerable groups, tackling child sexual exploitation, children missing and gangs

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

3. *Improving practice to children looked after*

4. *Improving practice to care leavers*

5. *Improving practice in fostering and adoption*

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

6. *Improving practice through better leadership and management*

7. *Leadership team enablers*

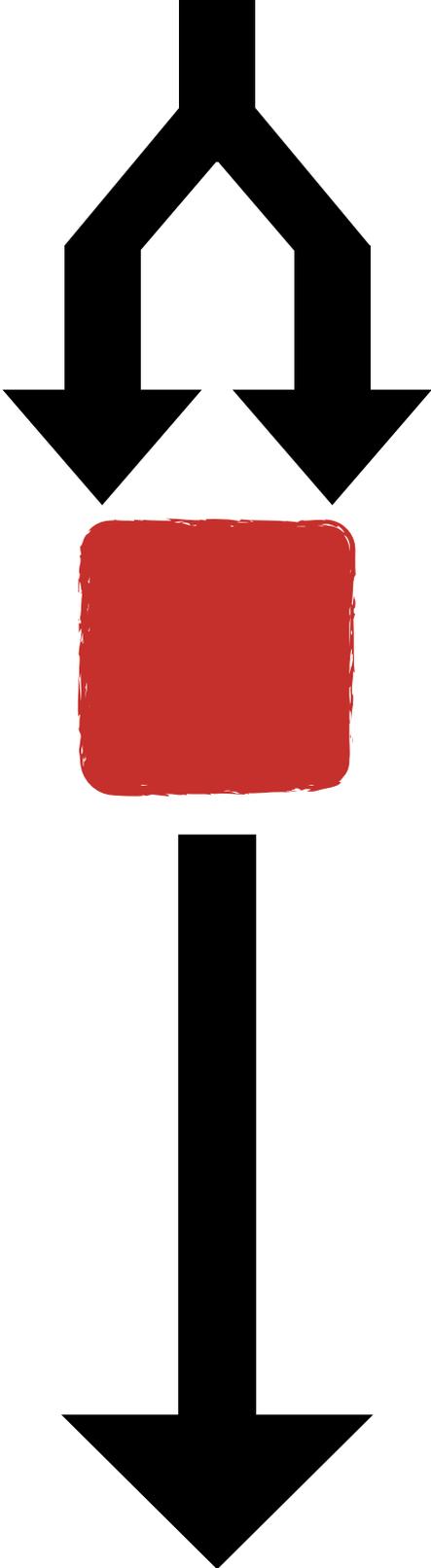
To achieve excellence, we must aspire to deliver demonstrable and sustained improved outcomes in the lives of our children and young people. However, I want to be clear here that we are not working to achieve a 'Good' or better inspection outcome. Our motivation is rooted in achieving excellence by knowing that how we work with our children, young people and families in need of early intervention and children's social care support improves their life outcomes. An inspection then provides an external validation of our work.

As Interim Chief Executive, I am excited and inspired every day to come to Bromley and improve the lives of the residents in this borough. In this new role, I will continue to maintain a keen interest in the progress of this next phase of the *Roadmap to Excellence*, knowing that our work with vulnerable children and young people in Bromley keeps them safe, enables them to thrive and fulfil their potential.

I am keen to hear your thoughts and feedback on the priorities laid out in this document. Please feel free to come to one of my staff surgeries or email me directly at ade.adetosoye@bromley.gov.uk with any comments or suggestions you have.

Ade Adetosoye OBE

Interim Chief Executive



How do we review the quality of our practice?

To help us on our improvement journey, we must constantly check that our practice, as individuals, as teams, as services and as a Council, is good enough for our children and young people. We must never lose sight of what life is like for each child we are working with. We must not only ask ourselves this question but make sure that we can demonstrate this in our recording and supervision sessions.

The newly established Practice Improvement Board (PIB) is a key mechanism to support our aspirations. The board will provide scrutiny and challenge, identifying where we are working well and where things are not quite going the way they should. Additionally, the PIB will maintain a keen interest and focus on the bigger picture in children's social care that we need to be thinking about for our forward planning. As with all we do, the primary focus is on promoting excellence in practice and outcomes.

We have also revised our quality assurance framework, recognising the importance of regularly reviewing our practice:

- We have introduced set days for managers to carry out practice reviews of cases.
- We have removed the term 'audit' and replaced this with 'practice review', helping us all to focus on the quality of practice and impact.
- We have introduced practice review improvement meetings (PRIMs), formerly case audit progress meetings (CAPMs) for all cases.

What are the key areas of improvement?

This Roadmap brings together identified areas for improvement from:

- Our *Roadmap to Excellence* stocktake, which identified all areas where we needed to continue to improve
- Our comprehensive self-evaluation, which included a series of actions that we had already identified for Phase 3 of our *Roadmap to Excellence*
- The official recommendations and underlying suggestions for improvement from the Ofsted report in November 2018 and our improvement plan

The overarching improvement plan will be reviewed by the Children's Executive Board to ensure that the multi-agency partnership is able to scrutinise and challenge our progress as a local area in delivering improvements to services for children and young people.

We have also included the Ofsted inspection framework for local authority children's services as an appendix to this document, which will serve as a guide to enable us to identify what good services look like as we continue to develop an annual self-evaluation of our services to support our annual conversations with Ofsted.



Our vision and values

As we continue on our Roadmap to Excellence, our core vision remains as follows:

➤ **By working together with agency partners, we will ensure that every child in Bromley has the right help at the right time to keep them safe, and to meet their needs, so that they achieve, thrive and reach their full potential**

Core values and principles

Our core values and principles, that have been proven to be effective, are:

- Children's safety and their wellbeing are our priority.
- Listening to children, understanding their experiences and building effective working relationships with children and their carers is at the heart of all our work. Purposeful direct work and time with children and their families is key to achieving good outcomes.
- We will always treat families and children with respect.
- Early help and good quality intervention in a child's life when problems first appear is a key part of our approach and vital to preventing those problems getting worse.
- Partnership work with other agencies is essential to providing the right specialist and holistic help and support that families need. We can only support children effectively if we do so holistically with the multi-agency partnership. We will intervene with children and families at the right time and develop a thorough understanding of the needs and the risks to each individual child, and their lived experience, views and wishes. We will set out clear, easily understood, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) plans with agencies in partnership with parents and carers to address them. Where these are not successful, we will take timely, appropriate and robust action within a timescale that is right for the child.

- We will strive to ensure that every child who is unable to live with their birth family will, with the minimum of delay, live in a stable permanent family or care setting that meets his or her needs into adulthood.
- We will ensure that children looked after or leaving care in Bromley will have close attentive support that meets their needs, and that we will be as ambitious for their success as if they were our own children.
- We will respect and celebrate diversity and difference in children and families and ensure that it is properly understood and considered in the way that we provide services to individual children and their families.
- We will work hard to overcome discrimination and disadvantage in the way we deliver our services, including with those whose first language is not English.
- We will ensure that front line staff work in an environment that promotes good quality social work with families and that they have good quality supervision, manageable caseloads, the right up to date training, guidance, and the skills to do the job.
- We will use quality assurance, performance monitoring, and consultation with service users, frontline staff and partner agencies to constantly learn and improve our practice.
- The voice and experiences of children and their parents and carers who use our services will be known and heard by frontline staff, senior managers and leaders and used to shape and improve them. We will be honest, consistent, fair and transparent in the way that we deliver our decisions, policies and actions.



1. Improving safeguarding practice to provide better help and protection

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
1.1 We will continue to raise awareness of early help in the early years sectors with childminders and nurseries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake Self-evaluation 	More families will be able to take advantage of our early help offer through other settings in the borough	Children and families are helped at the earliest point of need and there is reduced need for statutory intervention
1.2 We will continue to improve support to under 5s through the Early Intervention and Family Support (EIFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation 	More families will have access to an improved offer of services for under 5s	Children and families are helped at the earliest point of need and there is reduced need for statutory intervention
1.3 We will continue to improve the knowledge base of practitioners and social workers through training of the impact of domestic violence in children and also understanding of key messages from research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation 	Practitioners and social workers are able to apply training and research that informs their practice when working with families where domestic violence is an issue	Children and their families receive support that is informed by training and the latest research

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
1.4 We will continue to provide to feedback to agencies when referrals are made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	Agencies are kept informed of the outcome of a referral, which promotes closer partnership working and strengthens support to families	Agencies in the local area work closely together to safeguard children and young people
1.5 We will improve the take-up of return home interviews and the effective use of information to identify and mitigate emerging risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report Self-evaluation 	The intelligence gathered from these interviews will be collated and reported to the weekly Missing, Exploitation and Gang Association (MEGA) panel	Children will be safer because professionals will have a better idea of the current risks and push/pull factors that are encouraging children to go missing
1.6 We will implement the new child protection case conference model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake Self-evaluation 	The new child protection case conference model is in place and consistently used	Child protection conferences are timely, involve a range of agencies and monitor risks of harm

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>1.7 We will use Education, Health and Care (EHC) Hub portal to share multi-agency information for children on EHC plans known to EIFS or children's social care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation 	<p>Multi-agency information for children with EHC Plans is shared in a timely manner</p>	<p>Children's services contribute meaningfully and support children on EHC Plans</p>
<p>1.8 We will improve the quality of information provided to homeless 16-and 17-year-olds to ensure that they understand the options available to them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 Ofsted report 	<p>Assessments for this group of young people will be more explicit about becoming looked after, meaning that young people are fully aware of their options and helped to make well-informed decisions</p>	<p>Young people are fully informed of what being accommodated under section 20 means and they are then able to make an informed decision as to whether to accept this or receive services under section 17</p>
<p>1.9 We will improve access to mental health services for children who require specialist multi-disciplinary services for complex disorders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 Ofsted report 	<p>The implementation of our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) trailblazer initiative will improve children's access to mental health by a seamless pathway that includes children and young people up to 25</p>	<p>Children will benefit from improved support at an earlier stage</p> <p>This earlier support will improve outcomes and prevent crises</p>

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>1.10 We will work with our police colleagues to improve the quality and analysis of Merlin reports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>We will gain a greater understanding of how and why children become known to the police</p>	<p>We can work closely with our multi-agency partners to identify potential safeguarding issues and keep children and young people safe from harm</p>

2. Improving practice for vulnerable groups, tackling child sexual exploitation, children missing and gangs

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
2.1 We will continue to strengthen the work in this area through the Missing, Exploitation and Gang Association (MEGA) panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	Children known to the MEGA panel are supported through timely information sharing and partnership working	Outcomes for children and young people improve through a consistent, co-ordinated and robust management of risk across the partnership
2.2 We will continue to update our “problem profile”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	We maintain an up-to-date problem profile to provide analyse and identify issues relating to vulnerable groups	Children and young people are more effectively supported through up-to-date analysis and identification of issues
2.3 We will continue to use the London Gangs Matrix in risk identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	We continue to inform the development of our own problem profile and data analysis of local issues and risks through the London Gangs Matrix	Children and young people in Bromley are more effectively supported through up-to-date analysis and identification of issues across London

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>2.4 We will pilot Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) co-locating with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	<p>Decision-making in the MASH is strengthened and informed by specialist workers who are knowledgeable about supporting children and young people at risk of or suffering from child abuse</p>	<p>Children and young people are supported by professionals who are able to identify risks and intervene to help keep them safe from harm</p>

3. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>3.1 We will continue to strengthen joined up care planning and the inclusion of health needs, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores and targets agreed at Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>Care planning is informed by the wider health, wellbeing and educational needs of the child</p>	<p>Children's care plans are holistic and are informed by the wider needs of the child</p>
<p>3.2 We will monitor the quality of reviewing (including midway reviews) of care planning by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation 	<p>More families will have access to an improved offer of services for under 5s</p>	<p>Children and families are helped at the earliest point of need and there is reduced need for statutory intervention</p>
<p>3.3 We will ensure IROs continue to monitor the placement stability, permanency, life story work and children's entitlements during reviews. We will continue to have oversight of care plans and understand its impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>IROs effectively monitor the placement stability, permanency, life story work and children's entitlements during reviews, improving the quality of care plans and understanding of the impact and difference they make</p>	<p>Children's wishes and feelings are given full consideration through high quality and effective support from IROs</p>

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
3.4 We will continue to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support to children looked after and implement the CAMHS transformation project following our successful bid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	Children looked after benefit from high quality and enhanced CAMHS provision	Children looked after are able to offer high quality CAMHS support services to improve their wider health and wellbeing needs
3.5 We will continue to close the attainment gap for children looked after, especially those at Key Stage 3 (KS3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	The attainment gap for children looked after is reduced and we support children to receive their full educational entitlement	Children looked after receive a good quality education that meets their needs and fulfils their potential
3.6 We will roll out orientation packs for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	Orientation packs are delivered for all UASC coming into our care	UASC young people receive immediate support, advice and guidance from the local authority

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
3.7 Monitor school attendance of children looked after where it falls below 90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation 	The local authority identifies and intervenes when there are issues relating to poor attendance for children looked after and enables them to receive their full educational entitlement	Children will be absent less often in school and be able to make better use of their time, remain in education and have better social networks with friends and peers
3.8 We will improve school attendance levels and educational progress for secondary-aged children in care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report 	<p>Improved early identification of children at risk of poor attendance by restructuring staff and responsibilities. Schools, social workers and carers ensure that an attendance plan is appended to the PEP</p> <p>We will continue to challenge schools where exclusion is being used repeatedly or without consideration of all issues of children looked after</p>	Children will be absent less often in school and be able to make better use of their time, remain in education and have better social network with friends and peers

4. Improving practice to care leavers

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
4.1 We will ensure we increase uptake and engagement of care leavers using the hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	Care leavers are more regularly using the care leavers hub, socialising with their peers and benefiting from a range of support from multi-agency partners	Care leavers are able to access good support, advice and guidance from the local authority and its partners, enabling them to move successfully into independent life
4.2 We will ensure that young people are supported effectively through transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	We provide effective and timely transition support from the earliest point to our children leaving care	Young people are supported to develop the skills and confidence they need to successfully transition to independence
4.3 We will further increase the Council's offer to provide apprenticeships to care leavers and through our commissioned services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake Self-evaluation 	We provide an enhanced offer of employment and work experience opportunities through the local authority, its partners and commissioned services	Children leaving care are able to apply for employment opportunities with the local authority as its corporate parent, enabling them to successfully move on into independent life

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
4.4 We will continue to ensure we have oversight of young people deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation, such as custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	We will work with partners to ensure that where care leavers are placed in unsuitable accommodation, a plan is in place to support them and find suitable post-custody accommodation	Children and young people in unsuitable accommodation are supported by their social workers who make plans to find suitable post-custody accommodation
4.5 We will co-produce with Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) response and support transition to adult mental health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation 	We provide effective and timely CAMHS support to facilitate to adult mental health services	Young people receive appropriate mental health support as they transition to adult social care services
4.6 We will ensure that all care leavers have access to their health history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report 	Young people will have better access to information about their own health	<p>Young people will have improved access to health services post 18</p> <p>Young people will have a lead professional to consult about any health concerns they may have</p>

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
4.7 We will support to care leavers to develop emotional resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report 	Reduction in young people feeling lonely, reporting low self-esteem and low confidence levels. Young people have improved access to relevant services and spaces to help overcome challenges	By improving their overall quality of life, self-esteem, self-worth and sense of making a positive contribution, we will be able to improve the emotional resilience of our young people leaving care
4.8 We will ensure that all Pathway Plans are up to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report 	All young people will have a pathway plan that is aspirational and supportive and ensures that their needs are appropriately met	Young people will be consulted, contribute to their Pathway Plans and feel secure in knowing how they will be supported (and by whom) to become successful adults
4.9 Pathway Plans must be updated when there are significant changes to the circumstances of a care leaver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2018 Ofsted report 	Responsive service delivery in relation to changing needs and circumstances for young people	When needs change for young people the support service that they receive will be responsive to these changes

5. Improving practice in fostering and adoption

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>5.1 We will continue to bring placement stability in long-term placements in line with London and the national average</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation 	<p>Placement stability for children and young people is significantly improved</p>	<p>Children and young people are in stable placements that enable them to reach their full potential</p>
<p>5.2 We will increase the range of suitable carers to reflect the needs of children in care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 Ofsted report 	<p>Increased capacity and variety of carers to care for our more complex and challenging young people</p> <p>Increasing awareness and information on caring for our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) population to form part of new Emergency Duty Team (EDT) rota for emergency carers to prevent young people being placed outside the local authority</p>	<p>The increase in, and reach and experience of, foster carers will prevent our children from being placed in residential placements that do not meet individual needs</p> <p>Young people will have wrap-around services and the local authority will have more control over the service offered</p> <p>Young people will be able to retain their schooling and their friendship base</p>

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>5.3 We will reduce the number of children placed out of borough and at a distance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 Ofsted report 	<p>By placing looked after children in borough, we are better able to manage access to schools, health, and mental health support and maintain connections to the local community</p> <p>Carers are also better supported and inevitably this improves placement stability</p>	<p>Our children and young people are better supported by stronger and more spontaneous relationships with their social workers</p>
<p>5.4 We will work towards achieving the Early Permanence Quality Mark</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>The local authority will achieve the Early Permanence Quality Mark, demonstrating our strength and commitment to delivering early permanence for children where adoption is in their best interest</p>	<p>Children and young people will benefit from early permanency arrangements that improve their outcomes</p>

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
5.5 We will work with our partners to launch the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	The RAA will be launched in 2019	Children and young people will benefit from adoption support that is organised at the regional level, which will facilitate quicker matching, increase adopter recruitment and support and reduce costs
5.6 We will continue to improve the quality of life story work for older children and long-term fostered children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	We provide consistently high quality life story work for older children and long-term fostered children	Older children and long-term fostered children benefit from high quality life story work, helping them to remember and make sense of their earlier lives

6. Improving practice through better leadership and management

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
6.1 We will work with our colleagues in education to improve options for co-commissioned alternative provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	We are able to provide appropriate alternative provision arrangements in partnership with our education colleagues	Children and young people are supported by appropriate alternative provision that meet their educational needs
6.2 We will continue to monitor case summaries and chronologies to ensure that the child's journey is easily understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	Case summaries and chronologies provide an up-to-date and comprehensive overview of a child's journey	Children and young people are supported by workers who understand their journey
6.3 We will fully implement the Bromley Relationship Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	The Bromley Relationship Model will be fully embedded as our model of social work practice	Children and young people will benefit from a relationship-based social work model, where we consult them, listen to their needs and shape their care in accordance with their wishes and feelings

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
<p>6.4 We will use advocacy and complaints feedback to ensure that children's voices help us to improve our practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>Advocacy feedback and complaints are collated, analysed and used to shape social work practice at an individual level and across the wider organisation</p>	<p>Children and young people are able to use the advocacy process and complaints procedure to share their views and enable us to improve practice</p>
<p>6.5 We will make greater use of formal consultation with children and families across the divisions to improve service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>Formal consultation is a regular process to enable children and families receiving services to give feedback and shape service delivery</p>	<p>Children, young people and their families are able to express their views to shape service delivery</p>
<p>6.6 We will refresh and implement the pledge for our looked after children and care leavers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	<p>The new pledge is implemented in 2019</p>	<p>Our looked after children and care leavers are aware of our commitments to support them as their corporate parents</p>

7. Leadership team enablers

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
7.1 We will continue to improve the quality of the accommodation, meeting rooms and reception used by social workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	The accommodation, meeting rooms and reception are kept in a suitable condition for our workers, our children and their families	Children and families will be met and supported by their workers in fit-for-purpose meeting rooms and reception areas
7.2 We will seek to explore opportunities to partake in and bid for practice innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	We will make the most of opportunities to bring innovative practice to Bromley	Children, young people and their families will benefit from innovative social work practice that improves their outcomes
7.3 We will implement a new IT system for social workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap to Excellence stocktake 	A new fit-for-purpose IT system will be rolled out as part of our improvement journey	We will be better able to support our children and young people with a fit-for-purpose system, which will enable workers to monitor risks, analyse performance and share information with partners

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
7.4 We will develop the social work academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	A new social work academy will be rolled out in 2019	Children and young people will be supported by social workers who are recruited, trained and retained in Bromley, providing high quality care and support
7.5 We will continue to develop our approach to commissioning of placements for children with complex needs and sibling groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap to Excellence stocktake • Self-evaluation 	Better focus around matching and more consistent family finding for our harder to place children	Improved placement matching for children and young people with complex needs/in sibling groups will ensure they have stable home lives and long lasting relationships with their carers and families

Evaluation criteria for Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services framework

Priority 1:

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Early help

- Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated.

Identifying and responding to children's needs and appropriate thresholds

- Professionals identify children and young people in need of help and protection. They make appropriate referrals to children's social care and can access social work expertise and advice. There is a timely and effective response to referrals, including out of normal office hours ^[1]. Professionals understand thresholds. This leads to children and families receiving effective, proportionate and timely interventions, which improve their situation.

Making good decisions and providing effective help ^[2]

- Children and families experience child protection enquiries that are thorough and lead to timely action, which reduces the risk of harm to children.
- Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously. Steps are taken to protect children and young people and the management of allegations against staff is robust and effective.

- Assessments and plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. Assessments (including early help assessments) are timely and proportionate to risk. They are informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. They result in direct help for families where needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective and lawful.
- Children in need of help and/or protection have a plan setting out how they will be helped and how their needs are going to be met and how risk will be reduced within the timescales appropriate for the child. Where families refuse to engage, clear contingency plans are in place. These are based on the assessment of need and risks to the child. Action is taken to avoid drift and delay. Plans and decisions are reviewed. Alternative decisive action is taken where the circumstances for children do not change and the help provided does not meet their needs or the risk of harm or actual harm remains or intensifies.
- Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements ^[3]. Key participants attend multi-agency meetings. These meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring. Actions happen within agreed timescales and the help and protection provided reduce risk and meet need.

[1] - This includes referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer

[2] - Focused on assessment, planning and review

[3] - Case conferences, strategy meetings, core groups and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC)

Management oversight of frontline practice

- Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Actions are clearly recorded. Systematic and high-quality management oversight of frontline practice drive child-centred plans and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child. Effective and timely planning, support and decision-making takes place during pre-proceedings work.

Participation and direct work with children and families

- Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are consistently seen, and seen alone by social workers where it is in the best interests of the child. Practice is based on understanding each child's day-to-day lived experience. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive.
- Children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development.

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

- Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse are effectively identified and responded to. Children and young people who live in households where at least one parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill-health, or where there is domestic violence, are helped and protected.
- Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately. This includes (but not exhaustively) disabled children, children who are privately fostered, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of radicalisation or exploitation or becoming involved in gangs.

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- Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them [4] For those who are missing or often missing, there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.

[4] - The local authority has arrangements in place to identify the number of children not in full-time school education and to respond where there are concerns about their welfare.

Priority 2:

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

Making good decisions for children

- Children and young people become looked after in a timely manner and in their best interests; decisions that children should be in care are based on clear, effective, comprehensive and risk-based assessments, involving other professionals working with the family where appropriate.
- Where it is not possible for children to return home, suitable and timely plans for permanence are made for them to live away from the family home.
- Where the plan for a child is to return home, there is purposeful work undertaken with the family so that it is safe for the child to return. Further care episodes are avoided unless they are provided as a part of an appropriate plan of support.
- The wishes and feelings of children, and those of their parents, are clearly set out in timely and authoritative assessments and applications to court. Assessments of family members as potential carers are carried out promptly to a good standard.
- Children's care plans comprehensively address their needs and experiences, including the need for timely permanence. Children's plans are robustly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff and other adults who know them. Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate and ambitious.
- Participation of and direct work with children in care and care leavers.
- Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them. Children have positive and stable relationships with professionals and carers who are committed to protecting them and promoting their welfare.

- Children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. They know how to give feedback or complain and understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken, and services improve where necessary. Children and young people have access to an advocate and independent visitor when needed. Care leavers are well-informed about access to their records, assistance to find employment, training and financial support.
- The local authority celebrates the achievements of children in care and care leavers. It shows it is ambitious for their futures.
- Children in care and care leavers are well represented by a Children in Care Council or similar body which is regularly consulted on how to improve the support for these children and young people.

Helping and protecting

- Children in care and care leavers are protected or helped to keep themselves safe from bullying, homophobic behaviour and other forms of discrimination.
- Any risks associated with children and care leavers offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited or exploited in any other way are known well by the adults who care for them. Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm. Children and care leavers are safe and feel safe. They are helped to understand how they can keep themselves safe.

Health

- Children in care and care leavers are in good physical and mental health or are being helped to improve their health. Their health needs are identified and met.
- Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history.

Learning and enjoyment

- Children and young people make good educational progress at school or other provision since being in care. They receive the same support from their carers as they would from a good parent.
- Children and young people who do not attend school have prompt access to suitable good-quality registered alternative provision. There is regular review of their progress. Urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces.
- Children and young people enjoy what they do and have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities. Adult carers have suitable delegated authority to make prompt decisions about children's day-to-day lives.

Stability and permanence

- Children and young people are safe and settled where they live. They move only in line with care plans, when they are at risk of harm or are being harmed. They do not live anywhere that fails to meet their needs. They are able to live with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests, including when they are adopted. Children and young people have appropriate, carefully assessed and supported contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them.
- Children and care leavers who live away from their 'home' local authority have access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they move outside of their 'home' area. Placing local authorities notify the 'receiving' local authority that a child is moving to their area promptly and ensure that services are in place to meet the child's needs before the child moves.
- There is a sufficiently wide range and choice of placements available to meet the needs of children in care.
- Effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers (including, as appropriate, foster carers, adopters, special guardians and residential staff) ensure that children and young people receive high-quality, safe and stable care that meets their diverse needs.

- All agencies and professionals work together effectively to reduce any unnecessary delay in receiving support and achieving permanence for children.
- Children are effectively prepared for, and carefully matched with, a permanent placement. Their wishes and feelings influence the decisions about where they live. Children are helped to develop secure, primary attachments with the adults caring for them. They are helped to understand their life histories, experiences and identities.
- The accessibility, style and clarity of case records enhance the understanding that children in care and care leavers have about their histories and experiences.
- Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home; this includes good use of concurrent and parallel planning, the Adoption Register and Fostering for Adoption.
- Fostering and adoption panels, and the respective decision-makers, ensure that children are effectively matched with families. Local authorities have arrangements in place to ensure consistently good practice and receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of the work of panels.
- Children who are adopted, their adoptive families, their birth relatives and adopted adults are informed, and are aware of, their entitlement to receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. When support is needed, it is provided quickly, effectively and leads to improved circumstances for the children, young people, families and carers involved.

Care leavers and transitions

- Care leavers have timely, effective pathway plans (including transition planning for children in care with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). These plans address all young people's needs. Reviews of plans for care leavers are robust and involve all key people, including the young person, who understands their pathway plan and contributes to its development. Plans for their future continue to be appropriate, as well as ambitious.
- Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. Care leavers have trusted relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including with family and friends. They receive the right level of practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, where necessary, until they are 25.
- Care leavers move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Young people are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday when this is in their best interest. They can remain living with their carers beyond their 18th birthday or, if more appropriate, receive ongoing support to live in permanent and affordable accommodation that fully meets their needs.
- Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through either being in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.
- Care leavers have accommodation that best meets their needs and helps them to develop their independence skills safely. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and addressed; alternative plans are put in place promptly when necessary. Houses in multiple occupation (HMO) are only used when it is a young person's preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.
- Care leavers are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

Priority 3:

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

Strategic leadership

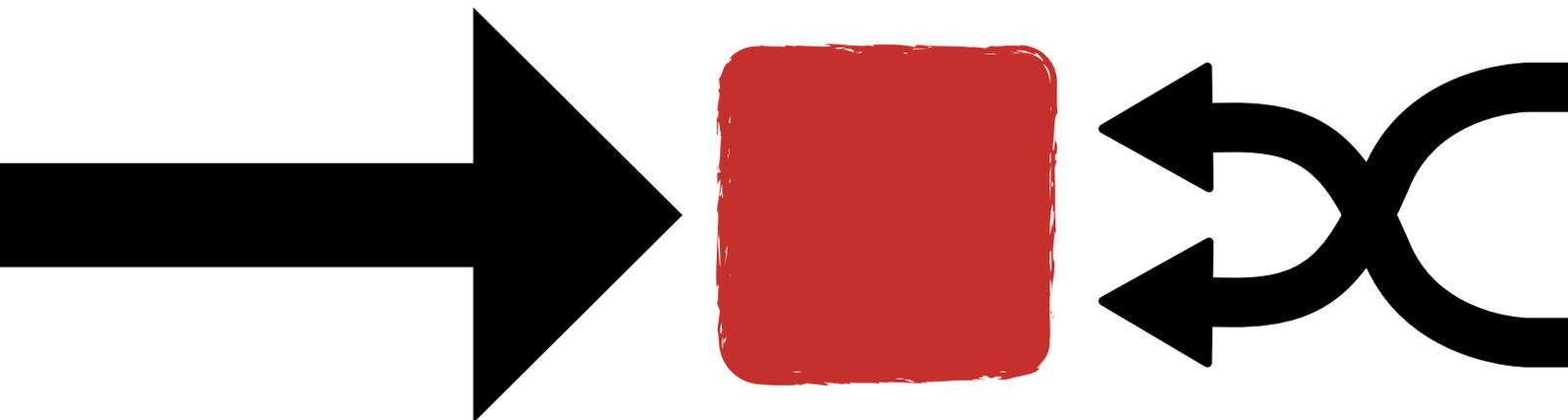
- The leadership of the Council, including the Chief Executive, lead member (and other members) and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) recognise and prioritise the needs of children and this is reflected in corporate decision-making, action and active attendance at key committees and boards.
- The Chief Executive and lead member are well informed and hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area. This is exemplified through accurate assessments of practice that drive improvement.
- Strategic leaders ensure that relationships with key partners including the health community, the police, schools, Cafcass and the family courts provide a helpful and effective context for social workers and practitioners to work effectively with children and families.
- The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent in line with the corporate parenting principles. There is a corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the Chief Executive leads a local authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects e.g. housing, career opportunities, education and learning.

Learning culture

- The local authority has a track record of responding appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority's self-evaluation of practice is accurate.
- The local authority has detailed and relevant knowledge of its local communities, including children in care and care leavers, and uses this knowledge effectively to meet their needs. Leaders identify the vulnerable groups in their local areas and their needs, and ensure that there is an effective response for these groups of children. Commissioned and in-house services have sufficient capacity and meet the needs of local children, young people and families in need of help, care and protection.
- The local authority can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services. The experiences of children, young people and families who use them are important, including learning from their complaints and from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.

Performance management

- The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness and uses this to drive improvement.
- Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.
- Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of the impact of wider systems on working conditions for practitioners ensures that they have the capacity and ability to develop meaningful relationships with children and families. The impact of any systems change is well-managed with a sustained focus on the experience of children and families.
- The local authority social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and accredited to deliver high-quality services to children and their families. Managers and practitioners are experienced, effectively trained and supervised and the quality of their practice improves the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. There is effective organisational support for the training and professional development of social workers and managers. Leaders and managers have created an environment where good social work can flourish, and this is evident in the overall quality and impact of social work.



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