Barking & Dagenham

Notice of Meeting

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11 October 2023 - 7:00 pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Barking

Members: Cllr Glenda Paddle (Chair); Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair); Cllr Andrew Achilleos, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Fatuma Nalule, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson, Cllr Muazzam Sandhu, Cllr Phil Waker and Cllr Mukhtar Yusuf

Co-Opted Members (for education matters only): Glenda Spencer, Sarfraz Akram, Sajjad Ali and Richard Hopkins

By Invitation: Cllr Jane Jones

Date of publication: 29th September 2023

Fiona Taylor
Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Leanna McPherson
Tel. 020 8227 2852
E-mail: leanna.mcpherson@lbbd.gov.uk

Please note that this meeting will be webcast via the Council's website. Members of the public wishing to attend the meeting in person can sit in the public gallery on the second floor of the Town Hall, which is not covered by the webcast cameras. To view the webcast online, click here and select the relevant meeting (the weblink will be available at least 24-hours before the meeting).

AGENDA

1.   **Apologies for Absence**

2.   **Declaration of Members' Interests**

     In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Members are asked to declare any interest they may have in any matter which is to be considered at this meeting.

3.   **Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 13th September 2023 (Pages 3 - 6)**

4.   **Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham - Action Plan and reporting template (Pages 7 - 40)**

5. **Report on the OFSTED Inspection of Children's Services and arrangements for publishing the Council's OFSTED Improvement Plan (Pages 41 - 68)**

6. **Work Programme (Pages 69 - 70)**

7. **Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent**

8. **To consider whether it would be appropriate to pass a resolution to exclude the public and press from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business to be transacted.**

Private Business

The public and press have a legal right to attend Council meetings such as the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, except where business is confidential or certain other sensitive information is to be discussed. The list below shows why items are in the private part of the agenda, with reference to the relevant legislation (the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended). ***There are no such items at the time of preparing this agenda.***

9. **Any confidential or exempt items which the Chair decides are urgent**

Barking & Dagenham

Our Vision for Barking and Dagenham

ONE BOROUGH; ONE COMMUNITY; NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND

Our Priorities

- Residents are supported during the current Cost-of-Living Crisis;
- Residents are safe, protected, and supported at their most vulnerable;
- Residents live healthier, happier, independent lives for longer;
- Residents prosper from good education, skills development, and secure employment;
- Residents benefit from inclusive growth and regeneration;
- Residents live in, and play their part in creating, safer, cleaner, and greener neighbourhoods;
- Residents live in good housing and avoid becoming homeless.

To support the delivery of these priorities, the Council will:

- Work in partnership;
- Engage and facilitate co-production;
- Be evidence-led and data driven;
- Focus on prevention and early intervention;
- Provide value for money;
- Be strengths-based;
- Strengthen risk management and compliance;
- Adopt a "Health in all policies" approach.

The Council has also established the following three objectives that will underpin its approach to equality, diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Addressing structural inequality: activity aimed at addressing inequalities related to the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, including unemployment, debt, and safety;
- Providing leadership in the community: activity related to community leadership, including faith, cohesion and integration; building awareness within the community throughout programme of equalities events;
- Fair and transparent services: activity aimed at addressing workforce issues related to leadership, recruitment, retention, and staff experience; organisational policies and processes including use of Equality Impact Assessments, commissioning practices and approach to social value.

MINUTES OF
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13 September 2023
(7:00 - 9:08 pm)

Present: Cllr Glenda Paddle (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Andrew Achilleos, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson, Cllr Muazzam Sandhu, Cllr Phil Waker and Cllr Mukhtar Yusuf;

Apologies: Cllr Fatuma Nalule, Glenda Spencer and Richard Hopkins

13. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Minutes (12 July 2023)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were confirmed as correct.

15. Adult Social Care - CQC Assurance and Improvement Update

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Integration presented a report on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance and Improvement Update.

The CQC assessed local authority performance in the delivery of adult social care responsibilities. A self-assessment and an improvement plan was developed to prepare for the assessment, with the self-assessment setting out what the council was doing well and improvements that needed to be made. The Improvement Plan set out the outcomes that the council would aim to achieve in the future for adult social care. Both the self-assessment and an improvement plan were structured around four themes that the CQC would review:

- Working with people;
- Providing support;
- Ensuring safety; and
- Leadership.

In response to questions from the Committee, the CQC Programme Lead, and the Operational Director advised that:

- It was unknown exactly how many residents within the borough needed social care, however there were reports and surveys undertaken that could give an estimate;
- There was a predicted overspend of £400,000 in adult social care for the third quarter. The cost for providing social care to residents would vary from case to case with and would increase for residents with either complex needs or younger people with long-term disabilities. Inflation also had an impact on the cost of social care as care providers had increased their costs; however, the CQC Programme Lead, and the Operational Director assured the committee that the in-year budget pressures were being mitigated to ensure budgets aligned with those allocated

and there were no further cost pressures;
- The borough currently had around 4,000 carers. It was estimated from that there were an additional 10,000 hidden carers within the borough, which would usually consist of family members providing care. Training had been provided to healthcare professionals and frontline staff to assist in identifying hidden carers. In 2023/23 there were 579 new carers identified;
- The information on health inequalities was taken from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment prepared by Public Health which in turn was taken from the Public Health England report on inequalities. The reports included reviews of mental health issues for both Black Caribbean and Black African ethnic backgrounds and had established trends;
- There were information and data sharing protocols in place that would be an obstacle in data sharing from the new electronic systems between the Local Trust and GP practices, however it would still be possible. The health service was exploring the possibility of utilising Pharmacies in terms of passing data on through the system.
- The methodology of the self-assessment of Adult Social care survey was set by the Department of Health and Social Care. It was sent to a representative sample of residents that received health and social care.
- With regards to residents' satisfaction with their care and support. 60-70% of users were extremely satisfied, 23% were quite satisfied, 9% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 2% were quite dissatisfied and, 2% were extremely dissatisfied.
- Regarding monitoring of the amount of time carers spend in residents' homes, the Committee were advised that care agents implemented a call monitoring system that would monitor the amount of time a carer would spend at residents' homes. The carer would need to call the system to log the times they would start and finish at a resident's home. The system would identify any trends of carers spending more or less time at the homes and this would be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Team;
- There were 1511 safeguarding concerns raised in 2022-23. Any safeguarding concerns would be investigated. however, sometimes the concern would not meet the criteria of safeguarding;
- In light of the Lucy Letby case, the CQC Programme Lead, and the Operational Director assured the committee that there was a whistleblowing policy in place within the care sector. Healthcare workers had been made aware of the policy; and
- The Cabinet Member updated the committee that there was some movement in inclusive growth with regard to providing specialist housing for vulnerable people. A more flexible approach to major adaptations to properties was suggested and the Cabinet Member reiterated that any work towards specialist housing was still in early stages.

Members posed a number of further questions, which the CQC Programme Lead would respond to in writing at a later time.

The report was noted.

16. **Waste Strategy**

The Director of Public Realm introduced a report on the Waste Strategy.

LBBD as the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) had a statutory responsibility to

collect waste from the Borough. It worked in conjunction with East London Waste Authority (ELWA) who was the statutory Waste Disposal Authority (WDA).

The Director of Public Realm advised that in January 2022, Cabinet approved the Joint Strategy for East London's Resources and Waste for the period of 2027 to 2057 for the future of waste management. This joint strategy was developed by ELWA and the Constituent Councils, collectively the Partner Authorities (Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham and Redbridge Councils).

The report before the Committee provided an update on the progress and plans of how LBBD, ELWA and other Constituent Councils aim to achieve the objectives of the Joint Strategy.

In response to questions from the committee, the Director of Public Realm stated that:

- The purpose of the Communication and Engagement Plan was to establish what methodologies would be most successful in getting messages across to all residents. It was decided not to publicise the Communication and Engagement Plan as it focused on building foundations with residents:
- Residents with larger families that had requested larger bins would receive a visit from the Waste Minimisation Team who may approve the larger bin. Discussions would be had on ways the family could reduce their waste. If there was general need for additional bins within an area, these would be provided;
- Enforcement around fly-tipping cases was not straightforward. Evidence was required to identify the individuals. Public Realm was working on a collaborative approach with enforcement colleagues to address high profile hotspots for fly tipping within the borough;
- Best practice for disposing of garden waste was via Open Windrow Compost – allowing the material to break down in the presence of oxygen. However, the compost would need to reach a certain POS standard before being used and this was not financially viable for the council;
- There was a fee of £43 per year per bin for garden waste collection. There was an average of 7000 subscriptions within the borough with the garden waste collection services forecasted to generate around £300,000. This covered the full cost of the service provided;
- The delay around certain legislation and consultations had meant there was uncertainty with the funding that the Council relied on to make it the plan effective. It was hoped that capital funding would be available for the council to purchase food waste collection vehicles;
- The council was restricted by budget regarding street cleaning; however the Communication and Engagement Plan included a strategy to develop waste champions within the borough's wards.
- All of the Public Realm fleet was ULEZ compliant and there were four electric road sweepers operating within the borough.
- In response to a question on educating residents on their waste management, the committee was advised that In June, the Council website introduced an A-Z for what residents could do with different types of waste;
- Toolkits for schools was proposed in Communication and Engagement Plan and would be used for schools to understand what they can do themselves to reduce waste as well as support the education for their students in waste management. The Council had received a grant funding from the City of London as part of the

Grow, Cook and Eat campaign.

The report was noted.

17.   Work Programme

The Chair advised that the Medium-Term Financial Plan had been moved from October 2023 to December 2023 and suggested to include an item on the Ofsted report on children social care for the November meeting.

The committee approved the amendments to the work programme.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 October 2023

Title: Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham – Action Plan and reporting template	
Report of the Director of Community Participation & Prevention	
Open Report	**For Information**
Wards Affected: All	**Key Decision:** No
Report Author: William Crossman, Participation Manager (Partnerships)	**Contact Details:** Tel: 07976 531531 E-mail: william.crossman@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Director: Rhodri Rowlands, Director of Community Participation and Prevention	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Alex Powell, Director of Strategy	

Summary

Barking and Dagenham is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse communities in London and has seen rapid changes in both the demographic of the place and its landscape and make up. One of the characteristics of Barking & Dagenham is its vibrant and rich diversity of faiths and beliefs and the positive contribution those faith communities make locally.

People of faith make up a significant and growing part of our community, with over 75% of residents identifying that they have a faith. As the community changes, our faith communities have changed with them and with this has come a significant demand for space, resources and support. Faith communities provide a vital and positive role supporting people most in need, strengthening resilience, reinforcing local identity and helping to connect communities.

Faith organisations are regularly and increasingly working outside of their "traditional" functions, becoming real hubs for community activity, social action, delivering essential services to the most vulnerable people in our communities. In addition to this, they are frequently applying for and utilising funding opportunities, to deliver programme supporting (alongside the usual pastoral and spiritual guidance) food supply and access, counselling, warm spaces, befriending or relief from loneliness, sports and social activities, debt and budget advice, early years provision, youth programmes and refugee/asylum seeker support.

We have gained traction and momentum over the past few years, in coordinating the response to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis and faith organisations can continue to play a key strategic role in helping the council to achieve its ambitions for residents. Whilst reflecting on the positive progress that has been achieved, we have also kept in mind that there are challenges still to be addressed. We know that some of the tensions in our communities continue to be focused on some of our growing faith communities and places of religious worship, alongside other issues like;
- access to spaces and buildings for worship
- perceived differences between treatment of religious groups

- tensions around issues such as parking and noise
- concerns centred around cultural and religious practices
- safeguarding within our communities
- addressing the wider context of health and health inequalities.

The borough has a strong history of community engagement and our faith-based organisations, small and large, play vital roles in this. However, it remains the case that not all faith organisations wish to engage with the Council (or statutory partners), or through the current structures and forums in place through which organisations may otherwise be engaged and involved. To this end, we have worked hard over the past 8 months to forge a new delivery focused partnership between faith leaders, in a coordinated effort to increase dialogue and shared action between different organisations. The newly established Faith Leaders Network has been a network under the BD_Collective since March and is working to address local unmet need and increase coordination between the member faith organisations. Currently the network has 18 members, supported by Faith Action (a local charity, who work under the banner of Lifeline church) and plans to expand to thirty members by the end of the financial year.

Continued, coordinated effort is needed to ensure that statutory partners and services are on hand to offer advice and guidance, support and opportunities to faith organisations to keep them involved and current, and that we use all available means of doing this. This has been provided in many forms from the Council, not just with the establishment of the new network. Fait organisations are continuing to benefit from stronger relationships with many departments in the council, including Public Health, Community Safety, Safeguarding, Events, Community Solutions and Participation & Engagement to name a few. The Engagement Champions programme has increased officers ability to undertake expert engagement and participation practice across many workstreams, however it is important that we take the opportunity to continue to learn more about our faith communities, continuing to grow our partnerships and build strong relationships and establish trust and reach with faith leaders.

To ensure we maintain the momentum gained over the past few years, we have built a multi-phased action plan, which directly links to the principles and themes explored in the Faith Builds Community Policy and looks to strengthen and maintain the progress we have made so far.

Recommendation(s)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

(i)   Note the progress from the Overview and Scrutiny review of faith engagement in February 2023.
(ii)   Review the high-level action plan and recommend any changes or additions (see Appendix 1).
(iii)   Note high-level progress made to establish the Faith Leaders Network and suggest further ways we could work together to deliver the actions in the plan; and
(iv)   Meet with representatives from the Faith Leaders Network, to hear more about the experiences of faith leaders in Barking & Dagenham. Officers will work with Governance Services to explore options to make this work following the presentation of the action plan.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Following the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in February, officers have brought together a proposal of a phased action plan (Appendix 1), which seeks to meet the cross-cutting themes outlined in the Faith Builds Community Policy and further strengthen our commitment to working with faith communities in Barking & Dagenham.

1.2. Working with faith communities to deliver the faith engagement action plan (see Appendix 1) is going to take the collective power of the council. The work, whilst being coordinated by the Participation & Engagement team, sits across multiple departments and will take the collective resources of those departments to deliver. We have worked to coordinate these actions and to ensure that the right contact points are utilised within the organisation to enable action to take place.

1.3. The proposed plan is phased over a number of delivery periods, with an iterative approach taken to ensure that we can deliver a number of immediate, medium and long-term goals for faith communities over the next 2-3 years. Whilst much work has been undertaken already to support faith communities, we will coordinate work around a number of phases over the course of the next 18 months.

1.4. The first three delivery phases cover this period and much of the work will be delivered during this time. Phases four and five have multiple overlapping actions, which refer to our ongoing commitment to supporting faith partners. The aim is to continue to develop actions which can be inserted into phases four and five, as we journey through the workstream and engage with more groups.

Actions

Action	What/Why
Work with faith organisations to review and refresh the Faith Builds Community Policy	- Further consolidate and strengthen its principles. - Extend its reach through more pledges to follow it. - Continue to demonstrate its influence and impact. - Update shared actions and commitments.
Re-focus and prioritise how we work together on a small number of themes and facilitate wide engagement to inform the development of actions to deliver these	- Cost of living crisis – together providing help and support. - Community safeguarding – keeping people safe and promoting their wellbeing and welfare in our communities. - Health inequalities – enable and empower faith communities to further contribute to improving health and tackling health inequalities. - Place-shaping – strengthen faith engagement in respect of place-shaping and development of inclusive growth aims.
Progress the development of specific guidance and principles on how faith groups access and use appropriate spaces	- Ensuring that this recognises the differences between and within faith groups – doing so in collaboration with faith organisations and drawing on good practice and examples where these exist.

Embed working with faith communities in Council's Corporate Plan, key supporting strategies and service plans	- Make sure that all services are aware of, and able to, connect and engage with faith groups to understand and enhance their contribution to achieving priorities.
Invite faith groups to give awareness training to LBBD staff to help promote inclusion	- Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do.
Develop new and creative faith-led forms of engagement	- Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities.
Consider the development or commissioning of a vehicle to coordinate engagement across faith organisations	- Continue to support residents within their communities, maintain regular and strong links with statutory partners, strengthen coordination of activity

1.5.   In Barking & Dagenham, faith organisations play a huge part in helping to provide services to residents. Now, more than ever before, the borough is accelerating the pace and scale of its partnerships with faith organisations and helping them play a major role in addressing some of our major challenges.

1.6.   These challenges, which include things like health inequalities, social isolation, the cost-of-living crisis, food provision, are challenges that affect us all and we cannot rely on individual organisations to deliver these in isolation. More than ever before, wrap-around systems-based approaches are needed to solve issues together and the council plays a key strategic role in assisting the VCSE and faith sector to coordinate their efforts.

2. Progress

2.1.   First, we have established the action plan as a phased approach with responsible officers across the council by meeting with and agreeing objectives.

2.2.   Secondly, we have worked with Faith Leaders and Faith Action to establish the Faith Leaders network. Locally, we have seen a coordinated approach to solving the cost-of-living crisis, where training, food strategy, debt advice and wellbeing support have all been

offered by partnerships between a range of different community facing organisations. The localities model has continued to coordinate VCSE support, and the social infrastructure contract has meant that networks are better connected and constantly emerging as groups look to work together to solve common issues.

2.3.   One of these networks which has emerged is the Faith Leaders Network, which formed early in the year, seeded by £40,000 from ringfenced council funding to support stronger, more connected communities using participatory budgeting methods. The initial project was to form a "Closed Collective", comprised of faith organisations that wanted to work on shared action.

2.4.   The newly established Faith Leaders Network is now a network under the BD_Collective since March and is working to address local unmet need and increase coordination between the member faith organisations. Currently the network has 18 members, supported by Faith Action (a local charity, who work under the banner of Lifeline church) and plans to expand to thirty members by the end of the financial year.

2.5.   "Purpose of Establishing the Faith Leaders Network", taken from the two-pager on establishing the network (see Appendix 2).

> **The purpose of establishing the Closed Collective (Faith Leaders Network) is to:**
>
> 1. **Establish a strong and enabled network of Faith Leaders:** To deliver, engage, represent and advocate for the specific needs of faith communities affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
>
> 2. **To encourage a collective approach to tackling shared issues across multiple faith communities:** To use the knowledge and expertise of faith leaders, to provide strategic oversight of projects and initiatives that work across different faith communities, regardless of perceived differences, enabling *interfaith-based social action* and promoting future dialogue and cooperation on shared issues.
>
> 3. **To ensure that action leverages in additional support:** From a variety of different sources, including utilising the physical assets and support provided by the faith organisations involved e.g., buildings, volunteer networks, reach into diverse and so-called "hard-to-reach" communities, additional project work and their ability to connect and empower individuals through faith.

2.6.   Networks like the Faith Leaders Network, only work because they can lever in additional support from existing mechanisms designed to support residents e.g. Cost of Living Alliance work from Locality Lead organisations, BD-Money and Warm Spaces. However, the network is only a small part of the overall faith landscape in Barking & Dagenham, and whilst we have plans to grow the network there will still be many organisations who have less enthusiasm to engage in this way.

2.7.   The organisations within the network currently, vary both in size and scale, with some being able to generate more income than others through both their charitable channels (e.g. funding applications) or their donations from worshipers. It is envisaged, that the support from larger organisations ensures that smaller ones can benefit from both their experience and expertise in this respect. Whilst the council's (and the vast majority of other funders) funding streams are always open and transparent, we cannot control or have access to the

decision making, for where organisations decide to spend income generated from donations. However, it is usually in the nature of these networks to share expertise and experience, other resources and time, which we will continue to encourage.

2.8.   Thirdly, significant progress areas include the way that we are starting to work with Public Health, to connect faith organisations with programmes which address health inequalities. Whilst this is a new area for some groups, for others, they are well versed in trying to address health needs within their communities. We are looking to utilise the unique reach and connection to faith communities, to coproduce projects which improve access to services and information, link in with other initiatives (like the localities work), improve social connectivity, physical and mental health, improve access to local services for those at risk of being marginalised, increase awareness of and education around vaccination and local health priorities and address unmet needs in their immediate community. Funding from Public Health has been agreed to progress this, and up to £5k will be available to groups, to co-produce acute initiatives, with realistic goals and outcomes.

2.9.   In addition, the Engagement Champions programme has increased officers ability to undertake expert engagement and participation practice across many workstreams, however it is important that we take the opportunity to continue to learn more about our faith communities, continuing to grow our partnerships and build strong relationships and establish trust and reach with faith leaders.

2.10.   Progress has also been made with safeguarding, where we are working with officers to promote initiatives and improve connections with faith organisations locally. The Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) has started to connect more formally with faith organisations, to raise awareness of SAB with faith leadership across the borough. Safeguarding is a top priority for many faith organisations (as evidenced by the survey work to produce the Faith Build Community Policy), and we have worked hard to make effective progress in this area. We have worked with the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) to introduce a template safeguarding policy, that can be utilised by any organisation, alongside recent training and development opportunities which have been communicated to faith leaders. Improving safeguarding practice is a constant process, and there will be many more opportunities to connect faith leadership in with initiatives over the course of delivering the phased action plan.

2.11.   The Council also continues to maintain links to the Barking & Dagenham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (BDSACRE), which is responsible for advising the local authority on religious education (RE). A function of the RE advisor is to offer advice on school issues to the Local Authority, for example where there is an opportunity to unpick cultural as opposed to religious objections to parts of the school curriculum. The SACRE also provides a useful professional sounding board to officers, who have been asked for views and opinions on a range of topics, including;

     o   Local tensions or possible flashpoints e.g. the launch of the new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) guidelines in schools.
     o   Public Health messaging e.g. Flu vaccine information and guidance for Muslim parents.
     o   Or during other world events (wars, terrorist attacks, police incidents) that could have an effect on the diverse communities in Barking & Dagenham.

2.12.   Finally continued, coordinated effort is needed to ensure that statutory partners and services are on hand to offer advice and guidance, support and opportunities to faith organisations to keep them involved and current, and that we use all available means of doing this. This has been provided in many forms from the Council, not just with the

establishment of the new network. Faith organisations are continuing to benefit from stronger relationships with many departments in the council, including Public Health, Community Safety, Safeguarding, Events, Community Solutions and Participation & Engagement to name a few.

3. **What next**

3.1. The aim is to deliver the majority of the actions in the phased action plan over the course of the next 18 months, however we know that the landscape in the borough has shifted since the launch of the Faith Builds Community policy. New faith organisations are emerging periodically, and we need to employ a flexible approach that enables the development of new actions, to complement the existing approach. Therefore, we are proposing that phases four and five offer space and capacity, that can be filled with future actions that meet the needs of faith organisations at the time.

3.2. In addition, if agreed, officers will convene a meeting of members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee with faith leaders to discuss the action plan.

3.3. There is much to be proud of in the work that has been undertaken over the course of the last few years. By developing a local policy that explores themes and commits stakeholders in more depth, Barking & Dagenham has gone even further in strengthening its approach to supporting its faith communities than any other borough in the UK.

3.4. Faith organisations have played a key role in helping to ensure residents are better protected against the most challenging life events. The cost-of-living crisis has laid bare the type of support that is necessary and vital to ensure residents are not left behind, and with valuable, coordinated, whole-council support and investment, faith organisations and the strong leadership within them will continue to play their part in ensuring that this continues in the future.

4. **Financial Implications**

4.1. Any budgets mentioned have been used from existing ringfenced funding.

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1. Refer to Appendix 2 – OSC Faith Engagement Feb 2023

6. **Consultation**

Consulted	Meeting	Date
Cabinet Member for Community Leadership & Engagement	Faith Engagement Update	11 Sep 2023
	Portfolio Meeting	03 Oct 2023
Executive Team	Executive Team Meeting	14 Sep 2023

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1. Action Plan for Faith Engagement
- Appendix 2. OSC Faith Engagement Feb 2023

Progress Overview - Multi Phase OSC Plan

Project Name	OSC Faith Engagement - Delivery
Project Manager	Billy Crossman

	Owner	Team/Dept.	Start Date	End Date	Planned Actions	Actions Completed	Actions Remaining	% Completed	RAGP
Start			01/10/22	01/10/25					
Overall Progress	BC	P&E Team	01/10/22	01/10/25	35	15	20	43%	G
Phase 1	BC	see sheets	01/03/23	30/06/23	11	8	3	73%	G
Phase 2	BC	see sheets	01/07/23	31/12/23	28	4	24	14%	Y
Phase 3	BC	see sheets	01/01/24	30/05/24	17	3	14	18%	Y
Phase 4	BC	see sheets	01/06/24	30/12/24	6	0	6	0%	Y
Phase 5	BC	see sheets	01/01/25	30/06/25	3	0	3	0%	Y
Phase 6	BC	see sheets	01/07/25	30/12/25	TBC	TBC	TBC	0%	Y

Please note - Some actions are planned out across several different delivery phases, so are double counted in the phases.

Colour Key
Red - Behind Schedule
Amber - In progress
Green - On track
Purple - Not Started Yet

Week Commencing

Review/Renew the Faith Builds Community Policy Themes and Actions						
OSC Action Stream	To do	Lead	By when	Status (RAG)	Commentary	Phases
Further consolidate and strengthen the principles	Review current principles, in light of new data on make up of faith communities in B&D	BC	Oct-23		Principles reviewed in line with data from Census, forming part of overall OSC workstream and to be reviewed again after borough survey completed.	1+2
Further consolidate and strengthen the principles	Design a survey, to be completed by faith leaders (either online or in 1-2-1 engagements) that draws out current issues and helps to design new actions/commitments.	BC	Nov-23		Survey questions to be designed Faith leaders network to be sounding board.	1,2
Extend the reach of FBC policy through more pledges to follow it	Renew the council's commitment to supporting faith organisations, through a clear outline linking to outcomes in the new corporate plan.	TBC	TBC			2
Extend the reach of FBC policy through more pledges to follow it	Renew our commitment to the Charter for Faith & Belief Inclusion – signed in 2019.	BC	Oct-24			3 + 4
Continue to demonstrate its influence and impact	Regularly update the B&D Faith Forum, Faith Leaders Network and other stakeholders, through the creation of better communication mechanisms between the council and faith leaders.	BC	Oct-23		Faith leaders database still widely in use to communicate info Utilise faith leaders network for centralised info and access to mapping	All phases
Update shared actions and commitments to faith leaders in B&D	Ensure that updates and commitments are widely communicated via the Faith Leaders Network and Faith Forum, and using the faith mailing list.	BC	Cyclical Basis			All phases

Refocus and reprioritise how we work with Faith Communities						
OSC Action Stream	**To do**	**Lead**	**By when**	**Status (RAG)**	**Commentary**	**Phases**
Cost of living crisis –providing help and support together	Continue to support the Closed Collective (Faith Leaders Network) through monitoring and steering of the contract with FaithAction.	BC (P&E)	Ongoing – until Oct 2023.	🟩	Closed collective are supported through the contract until Oct 2023. Alternative funding currently being sought.	1+2
Community safeguarding – keeping people safe and promoting their wellbeing and welfare in our communities	Coordinate any training or development opportunities and communicate them widely to the faith network. Starting point is discussion with the Adults and Children's Safeguarding Leads and Gary	BC/Mike Cullen	TBC	🟩	DSL Refresher training has been offered to all faith groups 05 July 23 > Managing allegations > Training to be offered as and when it becomes avialable, but being actively progressed through Multi Agency Training Coordinator (Safeguarding Children Partnership) > Will explore if SAB also have suitable training to offer to faith groups	2
Health inequalities – enable and empower faith communities to further contribute to improving health and tackling health inequalities	Enable further engagement/representation in the Health & Wellbeing Board and ensure that faith outcomes are represented in the shaping of the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2024 on).		TBC	🟪	Aug 2023 - Bid for Health Inequalities funding successful, £100k to work with Faith Leaders Network.	3
Place-shaping – strengthen faith engagement in respect of place-shaping and development of inclusive growth aims	Meet with strategic leads to help shape future actions within Inclusive Growth and Place Shaping strands of work.	Rebecca Ellsmore	Oct-23	🟧	05/07/2023 - Met with IG leads, to discuss developing and shaping actions in to the action plan. To be finalised in phase 3.	2+3
Planning - strengthen faith engagement in respect of place-shaping and development of inclusive growth aims	Update planning advisory note to reflect changes in demand for new faith spaces	Marilyn Smith	Jul-24	🟧	20/07/2023 - Met with head of planning to disucss timeline, agreed to extend into phase 3	3

	Guidance/principles for faith group access to spaces					
OSC Action Stream	**To do**	**Lead**	**By when**	**Status (RAG)**	**Commentary**	**Phases**
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance	Meet strategic leads for planning, to agree actions that lead to co-production of guidance principles with faith leaders.	Marilyn Smith	Jun-23	🟢	1. Have met with MS, agreed to review plannign advisory note, process to be determined. - Link to action 6 in "Work with Fiath Communities" - met to agree update to planning advisory note.	1
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance	Design survey questions that engage faith leaders on their places and spaces needs and that discover access issues they have had.	BC/ZC/DJ	Nov-23	🟣	Survey questions in design phase.	2+3
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance (Inclusive Growth)	Enabling faith leaders to take advantage of commercial opportunities to maximise opportunities to utilise their spaces and link in to initiatives to recruit locally.	Rebecca Ellsmore	TBC	🟣		3
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance	Engage with faith leadership around the change of usage guidance, and seek to clarify ambiguity over terminology or process.	Marilyn Smith	Nov-23	🟣		2+3
Update shared actions and commitments	Update shared actions and updates, including updated action plan to OSC	BC	Oct-23	🟢	To be shared in October OSC meeting	2
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance on events in parks and open spaces	Update guidance around use of parks and open spaces, with events team and other stakeholders in the council, to ensure there is a fair and equitable process to apply for space.	BC, Events team (Sarah Belchambers)	Dec-23	🟠	July 23 - Have held initial meeting to discuss, will progress further in due course.	2,3
Collaborate with faith organisations to introduce better guidance	Develop policy on commercial assets, including Community/potential Faith spaces.	Leona Menville/Alan Caddick	TBC	🟣		3

Embed working with faith groups using corporate plan aims/objectives						
OSC Action Stream	**To do**	**Lead**	**By when**	**Status (RAG)**	**Commentary**	**Phases**
Make sure that all services are aware of, and able to, connect and engage with faith groups.	Utilise opportunities to connect faith leaders network into council services, through clear lines into community hubs, locality leads and the VCSE work e.g. Localities project.	Faith Leaders Network, BC	Ongoing			All phases
Make sure that all services are aware of, and able to, connect and engage with faith groups.	Public Health - Health Inequalities - bid for work to support faith-based coproduction and delivery in meeting objectvies in health and wellbeing strategy.	P&E - CB/BC	Mar-24		Aug 2023 - COMF funding successful - £100k to support coproduction project with faith leaders.	2+3
Increase understanding and awareness of contributions to achieving service priorities.	Ensure that the contributions of faith communities are reflected in council communications	SK/BC (Comms)	Jun-24			2
Increase understanding and awareness of contributions to achieving service priorities.	Ensure that a clear reporting pathway exists to demonstrate impact to governance groups.	?	Jul-24		Need to explore which groups (SAB possibly, but not governance..)	3
Increase understanding and awareness of contributions to achieving service priorities.	Continue to support service providers to utilise opportunities to work with faith communities, especially where co-production/co-delivery is necessary e.g. Public Health, Community Safety, Commissioning.	BC/DJ	Ongoing		Aug 2023 - Clear links to Public Health through COMF funding.	All phases
Increase understanding and awareness of contributions to achieving service priorities.	Ensure there is faith representation on the Safeguarding Adults Board.	Joanne Kitching	Apr-24		05/09/2023 - Met with SAB officers to discuss links into specific faith cohorts.	2
Increase understanding and awareness of contributions to achieving service priorities.	Safeguarding Adults Board chair to meet with faith leaders network to engage around SAB functions and explore faith element of safeguarding	Joanne Kitching	Oct-23		05/09/2023 - Date and time for meet tbc - Met with SAB officers to discuss.	2, 3

Improved Inclusion/Awareness of Faith Organisations						
OSC Action Stream	**To do**	**Lead**	**By when**	**Status (RAG)**	**Commentary**	**Phases**
Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do	Explore ways to increase faith awareness and inclusion among staff, through improved access and connections to faith organisations, faith leaders and by improving consultation and engagement practice.	P&E Team	Jul-24		BC to explore how to incorporate more faith elements into Engagement Champions Programme.	3
Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do	Explore whether the "Should I take my shoes off" staff guidance aims/objectives are fit for purpose and whether a refresh is necessary.	BC	Jan-24		Possibility of taking through the Faith Leaders Network - is the guidance still relevant - or is faith inclusion training enough?	2 + 3
Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do	Ensure that departments are aware of the opportunities to visit faith venues and build relationships with faith leaders and their wider communities.	BC/ZC/DJ	May-24		07/2023 - Although specific work on this has not started, the department constantly recieves requests from other departments to be linked in to faith leaders/faith organisations. The upcoming CQC inspection is an example of where we have recently attempted to aide officers to do this.	3
Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do	Utilise opportunities to engage staff using existing mechanisms e.g. Coffee with Engagement and Engagement Champions network	BC/ZC/DJ	Jan-24			2+3
Raise awareness of faith communities and working with and alongside and promoting inclusion in all we do	Continue to support Interfaith Week activities, through existing partenrship with Faith Forum, but also drawing in additional buy-in from Faith Leader Network and staff groups.	BC/DJ	Annual		08/2023 - Planning for 2023 flag raising has started and initial conversations will be help to acertain what faith leaders actually want from this.	1,2,3,4,5

	Develop new and creative faith-led forms of engagement					
OSC Action Stream	To do	Lead	By when	Status (RAG)	Commentary	Phases
Place Shaping - Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities	Engage with Inclusive Growth and planning teams to set actions that lead to positive practical changes	BC	Jul-23		07/2023 - Met with colleagues, BC to share project plan and IG to feed in actions	2,3
Health Inequalities - Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities	**Continue to take a faith-led approach to solving local issues, by;** - Including faith communities in funding bids - Delivering using faith organisations as commissioned providers - Extending the reach of projects into faith communities by utilising strategic relationships with faith leaders.	Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Board	Jul-24		07/2023 - COMF (covid funding) programme funding bid successful, £100k for coproduction programme with Faith Leaders Network. 08/2023 - Faith Action have supported the Faith Leaders Network to apply for funding to continue to support existing cost-of-living work. Outcomes expected Oct 2023.	3,4
Community Safeguarding - Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities	Continue to encourage faith involvement in CSP through membership of the Tension Monitoring Group.	Community Safety Manager	Jan-24		08/2023 - Currently no Community Safety Manager in post, will revisit later in the year. Officers confirmed faith leaders are still periodically invited to TMG meetings.	2, 3
Community Safeguarding - Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities	Ensure that the LADO is supported to deliver responsive and well-timed in-person/online engagement sessions with faith communities, focused on community safeguarding.	Mike Cullern/BC	Jan-24		BC and LADO to discuss new training opportunities and opportunities to put on more safeguarding policy workshops.	2+3
Cost of Living Crisis – Encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities	Continue to support the Closed Collective (Faith Leaders Network) and consider further support to encourage more involvement across a wider range of groups.	BC	Nov-23		08/2024 - COMF Funding of £100k has been allocated to support coproduction project.	2

				Use of a commissioned vehicle to coordinate engagement across faith groups		
OSC Action Stream	**To do**	**Lead**	**By when**	**Status (RAG)**	**Commentary**	**Phases**
Continue to support residents within their communities, maintain regular and strong links with statutory partners	Ensure that all partner locality leads are aware of faith organisations in their area, and what support they can offer to residents.	BC	Aug-23		Two of the currnet locality leads are engaged through faith leaders network - others still to be engaged, but most are aware (anecdotally) of groups in their areas offering support	2,3
Strengthen coordination of activity, through a concerted effort to engage a wider cohort of faith leadership.	Continue to support the Faith Leaders Network, formed by the Closed Collective concept, and identify ways that this can be resourced and supported from across the council.	P&E	Ongoing			All phases
Strengthen coordination of activity, through a concerted effort to engage a wider cohort of faith leadership.	Support the Faith Leaders Network to identify and work with the most appropriate support organisations.	BC	Oct-23			2
Strengthen coordination of activity, through a concerted effort to engage a wider cohort of faith leadership.	Support any funding bids that the Faith Leaders Network may wish to make with expertise and positive scrutiny.	BC/P&E	Oct-23		08/2023 - Faith Action have supported the FLN with a number of funding bids, outcomes tbc.	2+3
Strengthen coordination of activity, through a concerted effort to engage a wider cohort of faith leadership.	Development of new actions as and when required to support delivery of the vehicle.	TBC	TBC			4,5,6
Strengthen coordination of activity, through a concerted effort to engage a wider cohort of faith leadership.	Continue to provide representation on BDSACRE and maintain links to local faith leadership.	P&E/Prevent/Safeguarding	Ongoing		Ongoign work to support SACRE reported via Safeguarding Boards.	All phases

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 Feb 2023

Title: Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham	
Report of the Director of Community Participation & Prevention	
Open Report	**For Information**
Wards Affected: All	**Key Decision:** No
Report Author: William Crossman, Faith & Inclusion Manager	**Contact Details:** Tel: 07976 531531 E-mail: william.crossman@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Director: Rhodri Rowlands, Director of Community Participation and Prevention	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Fiona Taylor, Acting Chief Executive	

Summary

The Barking and Dagenham Together; Borough Manifesto indicated that residents want "a friendly and welcoming Borough with strong community spirit" and to become "a place people are proud of and want to live, work, study and stay.

One of the characteristics of the borough is its vibrant and rich diversity of faiths and beliefs and the positive contribution those faith communities make locally. People of faith make up a significant and growing part of our community, and as the community changes so are our faith communities. Faith communities provide a vital positive role supporting people most in need, strengthening resilience, reinforcing local identity and helping to connect communities.

For example, faith-based organisations have played a significant part in reducing and mitigating the impact of the Covid pandemic on residents, including as part of community led BDCAN response alongside other community organisations. They are now providing vital early help and support of residents navigating the cost-of-living crisis and there are models of national best practice in the borough, including one of the Uk's first ever Beacon Mosques which partnered with the Council in opening a community Hub and acting as one of the Cost of Living Locality partners.

Faith organisations are regularly and increasingly working outside of their "traditional" functions, becoming real hubs for community activity, social action, delivering essential services to the most vulnerable people in our communities. In addition to the usual pastoral and spiritual support, faith organisations have through a range of actions expanded and enhanced their offer, branching into the provision of things such as food support, counselling, warm spaces, befriending or relief from loneliness, sports and social clubs, debt and budget management, early years provision, youth programmes and refugee/asylum seeker support.

The Faith Builds Community policy, launched in 2019, recognised the need to reinforce the contribution of faith communities, build and strengthen the existing relationships and networks in our borough as well as provide a basis for collective action to address the challenges we face.

The policy set a vision shaped by the firm belief that we all have a part to play in achieving 'a better connected, faith-friendly borough, where people of all backgrounds feel safe, celebrated and included'.

The Policy and the core themes and priorities within it, have provided the basis for the council's approach to working with faith communities. In this report we look back at what has been achieved and set out some initial steps on how we can continue to work with and alongside our faith communities.

In doing so, it is important to recognise that while much positive progress has been achieved, there remain key challenges to address. We know that some of the tensions in our communities continue to be focused around some of our growing faith communities and places of religious worship, alongside other issues. These include the accessible use of spaces and buildings for worship, perceived differences and tensions around issues such as parking and noise, concerns centred around cultural and religious practises, safeguarding within our communities and addressing the wider context of health and health inequalities.

The borough has a strong history of community engagement and our faith-based organisations, small and large, play vital roles in this. However, it remains the case that not all faith organisations wish to engage with the Council (or statutory partners), or through the current structures and forums in place through which organisations may otherwise be engaged and involved.

Concerted, consistent and coordinated effort is needed to ensure that statutory partners and services are on hand to offer advice and guidance, support and opportunities to faith organisations to keep them involved and current, and that we use all available means of doing this. This has been provided in many forms from the Council, with many faith organisations now benefiting from stronger relationships with Public Health, Community Safety, Safeguarding, Events, Community Solutions and Participation & Engagement to name a few departments. However, it is important that we use this review to explore what more, and how best, the Council can continue to build its relationships, and establish trust and reach with faith leaders.

The demographic of the borough has changed significantly over the course of just one generation, and this is reflected in our faith communities. Although we are still a majority Christian borough, there has been a significant shift in religion and denominations within some religions.

There is still a long way to go and much to do in terms of how we can best work together with faith communities and in making sure we maintain the momentum gained over the past few years. Faith organisations can continue to play a key strategic role in helping the council to achieve its ambitions for residents and we need to consider how this can continue to evolve in the future.

Recommendation(s)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

(i)   Note the changes in the religious make-up of the borough over the last 10 years
(ii)   Note high-level progress from the Faith Builds Community Policy
(iii)   Consider and comment on the steps proposed on how the council continues to work alongside faith communities in future, and in particular, to comment on the priority themes and suggest any other opportunities or steps that could be taken

(iv)	Invite faith leader representatives from across our faith communities to an engagement discussion with Committee members to hear their feedback on what is working well, issues and challenges and how these can best be addressed

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Barking & Dagenham is a diverse and multi-cultured, multi-faith borough. A myriad of different communities call the borough home and faith organisations play a huge part in helping to provide the sense that the borough is a "friendly and welcoming borough with strong community spirit", the vision set out in our Borough Manifesto for 2037[1]. In the last 10 years the borough has accelerated its pace and scale of change. The population has changed significantly over the course of one generation. In the 2001 census, the boroughs population was 163,944 people and this had jumped to 185,911 in 2011 and by 2021 (census day), the population was estimated to have grown to 218,900 residents[2]. This is the 3rd overall highest growth in England & Wales and the 2nd highest growth in London.

Ethnicity

1.2 The ethnic makeup of the communities who live in Barking & Dagenham has also changed dramatically. In 1991, the borough was 93.19% white British, but by 2011 this had dropped to 58.3% and is now 30.9% according to the 2021 Census, although the majority of MSOA's (Middle Layer Super Output Area) in the borough still have White British as the largest ethnic group. At the same time, the boroughs faith communities have changed, with the former majority Christian population (69% in 2001) declining to 45.5% in 2021, with an emerging multi-cultural, multi-ethnicity and multi-faith population growing since.

1.3 In the same period between 2001-2021, the Muslim population grew from 4.4% to 24.4%, which in real terms is a population increase from around 7,477 people in 2001 to 53,411 people in 2021 (over 700% increase). The makeup of these communities has also changed, they are larger and more diverse than ever before, with new faith groups emerging almost constantly as they seek to address the needs of the community.

1.4 The first table below shows the latest census data alongside data from 2001, 2011 and a religious survey of London faiths taken by the Mayor's Office in 2018. Whilst some of the increases/decreases seem drastic, it should be said that this is growth measured over the course of 20 years.

1.5 However, when looking particularly at the growth of the number of Muslim residents, this is the fastest growth of any London borough. The borough also has a high level of population churn, which is the rate at which people leave and are replaced by incoming residents. In B&D, the average churn rate (produced for the 2020 mid-year population estimates) is 15.7%, which sees around 18,000 new people arriving in the borough with around 19,000 people leaving in the same period. This is a significant factor when considering the cohesion implications, where it is more difficult to build relationships with neighbours and there are shifts in the community make-up within neighbourhoods.

Religion

---

[1] Borough Manifesto | London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (lbbd.gov.uk)
[2] Population and demographics | London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (lbbd.gov.uk)

1.6 The second table below shows the make-up of faith communities by MSOA (Middle Layer Super Output Area), showing the most prominent religion highlighted in each area. In all but two MSOA's, those identifying as Christian, are still the most prominent religious group. In the Barking East and Longbridge & Barking Park areas, the most prominent religious group is those identifying as Muslims. In ten areas, the second highest group is those who identify as having No religion. The highest numbers of those identifying as Hindu, are in the MSOA areas of Barking Central and Becontree Heath. Larger amounts of Sikhs are also found in the MSOA's of Barking East and Chadwell Heath East.

Religion	2001 (Census)	2011 (Census)	2018 (London Religious Survey)	2021 (Census)	Increase/Decrease since 2011	Increase/Decrease since 2001
Christian	69%	56%	54%	45.40%	10.6% decrease	23.6% decrease
Muslim	4.40%	13.70%	22%	24.40%	10.7% increase	20% increase
Hindu	1.10%	2.40%	3%	3%	0.60% increase	1.9% increase
Sikh	1.10%	1.60%	1.50%	2%	0.40% increase	0.90% increase
Jewish	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%	0.10%	0.10% decrease	0.20% decrease
Buddist	0.20%	0.50%	0.20%	0.40%	0.10% decrease	0.20% increase
Other religions	0.20%	0.30%	3%	0.40%	0.10% increase	0.20% increase
No religion	15.30%	18.90%	15%	18.80%	0.10% decrease	3.5% increase
None stated	8.40%	6.40%	n/a	5.50%	1.2% increase	2.9% decrease

Religion per MSOA

	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other religion	No religion	Not answered
Barking Central	37.8%	0.3%	8.7%	0.0%	33.9%	1.8%	0.5%	11.5%	5.4%
Barking East	34.4%	0.4%	4.7%	0.1%	41.9%	4.5%	0.2%	7.9%	5.9%
Becontree East	47.2%	0.3%	1.6%	0.1%	18.7%	1.0%	0.3%	25.4%	5.4%
Becontree Heath	41.4%	0.4%	6.7%	0.2%	21.5%	3.7%	0.7%	19.9%	5.5%
Becontree North	40.4%	0.3%	4.2%	0.1%	26.1%	3.5%	0.6%	18.9%	5.8%
Becontree South	49.4%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	18.4%	0.6%	0.3%	24.2%	5.4%
Becontree West	46.5%	0.3%	2.9%	0.1%	23.5%	1.8%	0.9%	18.4%	5.6%
Central Park & Frizlands Lane	50.3%	0.3%	1.9%	0.0%	16.3%	0.4%	0.5%	25.1%	5.2%
Chadwell Heath East	43.0%	0.3%	4.9%	0.2%	26.6%	5.8%	0.5%	13.7%	5.1%
Creekmouth & Barking Riverside	42.8%	0.8%	3.2%	0.1%	30.3%	2.7%	0.2%	14.8%	5.0%
Dagenham Central	51.5%	0.4%	1.4%	0.2%	14.3%	0.2%	0.4%	25.6%	6.0%
Dagenham Eastbrook	52.8%	0.3%	1.8%	0.2%	19.2%	1.2%	0.4%	17.7%	6.5%
Dagenham North	51.6%	0.2%	1.5%	0.1%	15.2%	0.5%	0.6%	24.7%	5.6%
Eastbrookend	52.0%	0.5%	2.5%	0.2%	12.5%	1.6%	0.3%	25.2%	5.3%
Gascoigne Estate & Roding Riverside	41.6%	0.4%	2.7%	0.2%	35.5%	1.0%	0.4%	12.8%	5.5%
Goresbrook & Scrattons Farm	50.4%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	17.7%	0.4%	0.3%	23.9%	5.3%
Longbridge & Barking Park	26.5%	0.4%	3.6%	0.1%	51.4%	3.8%	0.3%	8.9%	5.1%
Marks Gate	47.1%	0.3%	3.2%	0.4%	19.4%	2.1%	0.4%	21.9%	5.1%
Mayesbrook Park & Rippleside	49.3%	0.3%	1.3%	0.2%	20.0%	1.1%	0.4%	21.7%	5.7%
Old Dagenham Park & Village	52.1%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	16.1%	0.6%	0.8%	22.7%	5.8%
Rylands Estate & Dagenham Dock	55.5%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	19.5%	1.8%	0.4%	15.7%	5.2%
Thames View	46.7%	0.1%	1.4%	0.1%	28.4%	0.8%	0.4%	16.6%	5.6%
Barking & Dagenham	45.4%	0.4%	3.0%	0.1%	24.4%	2.0%	0.4%	18.8%	5.5%

Top religion highlighted per MSOA

Source: 2021 Census

Barking & Dagenham

one borough; one community; no one left behind

1.7 The latest census data tells us much about the make-up of our religious communities, with over 75% of respondents indicating that they follow one particular faith. Faith is fundamental to many peoples' lives in Barking & Dagenham, and for many, is the cornerstone on which they build their lives. This also extends into their decision making and influences where people turn to for support in a crisis, which is why our faith leaders are

vitally important to delivering the council's aims and objectives. In many cases, faith leaders and faith communities are the first point of contact for residents when they have issues. The Imam, Sheikh, Pastor, Reverend, Priest, or Spiritual Leader are spoken to before engaging with statutory services.

Local faith communities

1.8   Although the borough remains strong majority-Christian, the makeup of the Christian community has changed in this time, with the amount of what are generally termed 'black-majority'[3] churches (BMC's) growing significantly. Coupled with a steady decline in worshipper numbers[4] across the UK in more traditional and established denominational churches (Anglican, Catholic and Protestant), from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.5 million in 2010, or from 30% of the population to 11.2%, alongside a growth in membership of Orthodox, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches at the same time, indicates that the make-up of the Christian population in the borough has also experienced rapid change. This change is mainly made up of new Christian organisations springing up in the borough, in particular an increase in BMC's. Networks do exist within these church groups, with a particularly prominent network (Christian Voice) consisting of over 30 pastors, who work together in mutual interest e.g. on projects combatting serious youth violence for example, or Barking Churches Unite, which brings together a number of churches in Barking to address issues around food poverty, homelessness and isolation.

1.9   In Barking & Dagenham, the latest data[5] we have access to indicates that there are a large majority of broadly Christian organisations in the borough, with 115 groups currently on our database. There are currently 24 Mosques on our database (although we also know of over 30 Madrassah's that operate in the borough), two Buddhist groups (that we know of) meeting regularly, one Jain temple, a Sikh gurdwara and one Baha'i group. However, the actual number of organisations is higher, because new organisations are formed on a regular basis and some close or move location. Anecdotal information suggests there are over 200 Christian organisations in Dagenham alone[6].

Faith Groups/Meetings	Number
Baha'i	1
Buddhist	2
Christian	115
Islam	24
Jain	1
Jehovah's Witnesses	1
Multi - Faith	1
Sikh	1

1.10   We know that the facilities used by these organisations vary tremendously. Outside the purpose-built established Christian denominations e.g. Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Catholic Churches, there is one purpose-built Mosque and now one brand new purpose-built Sikh Gurdwara. Almost all other organisations use converted former residential, commercial, or industrial facilities, rent/hire community spaces or use other faith spaces when the organisation is not meeting. In some cases, multiple groups are compelled

---

[3] BMC's is an umbrella term, used to describe churches with majority congregations usually from Caribbean or sub-Saharan African descent.
[4] No15 UK Christianity 2005-2015.wpd (faithsurvey.co.uk)
[5] Faith Policy Appendix 1.pdf (lbbd.gov.uk)
[6] Faith leader estimates based on contacts held – provided by Barking Churches Together

(through a lack of available options) to share community spaces, but we know anecdotally that groups do not want to use what are termed "muti-faith spaces", although they are happy to hire space in generic community spaces in the first instance. It is also useful to note that although some organisations are deeply rooted in their community and serve a very specific geographic location, others see themselves as operating entirely across borough lines, being visited by scores of people from outside the borough.

1.11   All this change means that there are communities of people brought together as part of organisations, which are inadvertently competing for space, facilities and funding, and also attempting to grow their influence locally. This is what makes the response to the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis even more remarkable. Organisations that would not traditionally have worked together, have come together in innovative and symbiotic ways, working feverishly to support their communities while putting aside any individual needs. Post-pandemic, levels of what we term "organisational cohesion" are at an all-time high, with many anecdotal examples available of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations working together to drive change and manage the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

1.12   It is also important to note that there are spaces and themes which have the potential to cause considerable tension and issues between faith groups and the local authority. In isolated cases, we have seen friction between the local authority and faith groups on subjects ranging from; use of buildings, safeguarding policy, physical chastisement, radicalisation and extremism to issues caused by complex theological and societal clashes e.g., debates around LGBTQI+ inclusivity and attitudes about how this conflicts with religious observance. There is also, in some areas, an underlying suspicion of the work of statutory authorities, which played out in the mistrust of information supplied about the covid-19 vaccines and contributed towards an overall lower uptake of vaccines compared to the London average.

2.   Working with faith communities - coordination and approach

2.1.   The faith sector is not a "sector" in the same sense as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, or VCSE. It is a collective term, which encompasses a myriad of organisations from different faiths and faith make-ups, who are also in a lot of cases independent charities. While we can speak about the Voluntary and Community "Sector" and be confident of the existence of a loosely connected fabric of organisations, the faith "sector" is in fact much more detached and in some cases more isolated when compared to the VCSE.

2.2.   Social infrastructure support for the VCSE in the borough, is delivered through a strategic partnership of VCSE organisations who make up what is known as the BD_Collective. This group of organisations facilitate a "network of networks" that come together in a variety of ways to address challenges in the borough. Working on a range of priorities and themes ranging across cost of living, health inequalities, food poverty and health systems, to ensuring that people are more connected in their neighbourhoods.

2.3.   Within this context, there are highly skilled, highly involved faith leaders, who strategically work alongside the VCSE and the council, to ensure that there are routes and reach into faith communities locally. Many diverse and typically "hard to reach" communities, with varying needs, are supported locally by faith organisations to access services.

2.4.   However, this means that engagement can be highly dependent on growing and establishing trusted relationships with individual faith communities, based in large parts more on trust elements than through a single, consistent forum or platform. Working in this way can itself present challenges. The approach takes constant evaluation, a level of consistency (of personnel and of maintaining contact) and establishing new relationships with faith leaders (or those who work with faith communities) occurs almost on a monthly basis. Through the Participation & Engagement team and work with officers across the council, the council has sought to establish a network of relationships from across the faith sector and use these as the platform to better organise and coordinate cross-cutting work with faith communities.

2.5.   In 2019, recognising the need to help embed the borough manifesto targets into a growing and dynamic emerging relationship with the faith sector locally, the council launched a "first of its kind" policy titled "Faith Builds Community". The new policy was also a continuation of our commitment to faith communities from the strategic places report done by CAG consultants in 2017, which recommended that the council look to engage more extensively with faith leaders around faith-based needs in the borough.

2.6.   Faith Builds Community sought to address the need to grow the connections, shared priorities and relationships between faith organisations, the council and wider community in Barking & Dagenham. Sitting within the Participation and Engagement agenda within the council's overarching approach and model of local government, the policy works in tandem with our Cohesion and Integration strategy and VCSE strategy, the policies all seek to meet the targets of the Borough Manifesto, which sets out our 20 year vision to make Barking & Dagenham a place where every resident can succeed and the borough can grow.

2.7.   Faith engagement activity is regularly considered through the Community Engagement and Leadership portfolio, with executive oversight through Corporate Performance Group, to ensure it is aligned with corporate plan aims and objectives. All work in the faith engagement space is scrutinised by a variety of different mechanisms, from portfolio reports, which highlight best practice examples, national and local policy and strategy work e.g. the APPG work to define Islamophobia, which the council adopted in 2019, and to ensure that the council are doing what we can to support faith based social action locally.

2.8.   Events and initiatives are coordinated by a combination of officers from across the council, who are supported and advised by the Participation and Engagement team, who use their influence to connect the faith sector with other council departments. Working in this way we have been able to improve the ability of council to work with and alongside the faith sector. One area to note would be the way in which Public Health work with faith communities. During the pandemic we needed to support and communicate with faith communities around vaccine issues and safety (covid awareness and readiness), which relied on trust and building relationships. Recently, faith providers helped deliver the £480k Community Vaccine Champions programme and were key in embedding the vaccine uptake messaging locally, utilising their local reach into communities to improve trust in the processes. From the final report, Public Health reported:

"Seeing the new relationships and partnerships formed through this project and to know that the borough is in a better place with firm foundations regarding public health is promising"

2.9.   In 2021, the council commissioned Faith Action (a national interfaith charity) to provide specific capacity building support to the Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum (BDFF). This recognised that the forum had changed significantly since pre-pandemic. Membership had decreased, and the trustee board had reduced in size from around fifteen active members to eight. The reach and ability of the BDFF to remain active in the borough and work on

shared themes was also affected by faith leaders working solely on supporting communities through the pandemic. Faith Action worked with BDFF, aiming to:

- Establish a strong, independent, robust local faith forum.
- Make the Faith Forum sustainable and secure.
- Enhance and develop the forum, including to develop skills from within the trustee board that helped extend the life of the contract post-funding.
- Ensure that the forum could engage and connect with a wide range of groups and individuals in the borough.
- Provide an additional piece of work, that would help us gain a snapshot of the needs of the much-changed faith communities on Thames/Riverside.

2.10. Whilst Faith Action have worked closely with the BDFF, seeking to improve their capacity and have supported them in a range of ways to continue engagement with the wider faith sector, much more is needed. We are repurposing the remaining contract period to reflect the changing needs of faith communities, with a new lens on the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and a recognition that there remains more to do in terms of engagement. More information on this is provide in the *Cost-of-Living* section below from point 3.2.

National policy context

2.11 Nationally, the policy picture is not as clear cut. Although significant work has been undertaken to show the benefits that faith groups can offer across the country, it is clear that the government in particular is in an early staging phase in terms of its commitment to working directly with faith groups rather than through local authorities. The APPG group on faith and society, released a report titled "keeping the faith"[7] in 2020, which recommended:

- That the government encouraged the nationwide widespread adoption of the APPG faith covenant
- That a toolkit should be developed and distributed to each local authority in the UK, which sets out how they should look to work with faith organisations locally.
- That the government should support the establishment of a faith's advisory council, for liaison between faith groups and central government.

2.12 The report provided a snapshot of evidence measured against the start of the pandemic, showing that 67% of local authorities surveyed had seen an increase in partnership working with faith groups, with 91% reporting that their experience of working in partnership was "Positive". More diverse areas were more likely to see their faith communities as open and inclusive as opposed to closed or "conditional".

2.13 The report also recommended that the government appoint an independent Faith Commissioner, to promote and champions faith groups collaborations with local authorities. So far, it is not clear if any of these recommendations have been acted upon by central government, except for the promotion of the APPG faith covenant, which has been led locally by Faith Action in their capacity as advisors to the APPG.

2.14 More best practice examples of faith work in the UK, are available in Appendix 1.

3. Looking back - what we have done

---

[7] appg-keeping-the-faith-2.pdf

3.1. All faith engagement work is done under the headings and within the themes of the Faith Builds Community policy. High level progress can be seen in the table below, which sets out some of the accomplishments in the broader work between the councils and faith communities.

Theme	High Level Progress
Celebrating Faith Based Social Action	More than just receiving about recognising and celebrating the accomplishments of local organisations, this theme was about ensuring that we recognise the contribution that faith-based organisations make in the borough. We have moved this forward over the past few years, with faith organisations now playing a key part in delivering some essential services. We recognise and seek to amplify the impact of faith-based social action, by ensuring that it is a core part of delivery planning for services, such as with the cost-of-living work or BDCAN. Some key accomplishments include: The borough has recently had two faith organisations receive the Queens Award for voluntary Service, the highest award for VCSE and faith organisations in the UK. The Faith Forum held their inaugural Faith & Community awards in 2020, repeating this during the lockdown in 2021. Although the capacity has not been there to repeat the awards in 2022, there are still many awards that faith organisations are eligible and encouraged to apply for, such as the Women's Empowerment awards. Al Madina have recently won "Most Innovative Service" at the 2022 Beacon Mosque Awards.
Responding to hate crime and prejudice	The council continues to work alongside the police and its other providers and statutory partners, to address the issue of hate crime and prejudice in the borough. We now have more faith organisations than ever before as members of the Tension Monitoring Group and local connections with leaders and this, alongside a programme of hate crime training delivered over the course of 2 years, means that leaders are more informed than ever about what constitutes a hate crime and when/where to report it. The links we have fostered with programmes like the MOPAC Shared Endeavor Fund, the governments Places of Worship (POW) Security Funding Scheme and focus on National Hate Crime Awareness week, have enabled organisations in the borough to highlight and share local hate crime work.
Faiths working together	Faith organisations have worked together in significantly new and exciting ways since the launch of the faith policy. Spurred on by the reaction to the pandemic, organisations are now exploring new relationships and some are working together in entirely new ways with organisations that they would never have worked with previously. Recognising the necessity to work together and share resources, expertise and funding, but also there is a deep desire to ensure that organisations are fit for purpose and can expand

	services to the wider community. Faith organisations have continued to promote interfaith dialogue, through the work of the faith forum, but also independently initiating faith-based social action. The council has supported this through a range of programmes, from specific pieces of work done to map and piece together the impact of CV-19 on faith organisations, to our continued support of Interfaith Week, flag raising events, religious celebrations and promoting the work of the SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). Other examples include Food Hub Partnerships between faith groups, like the one established between Al Madina and Kingsley Hall Church, which means that produce can be shared across different organisations. Al Madina have also sought to integrate themselves further to the wider community, by establishing a unique Community Hub, which will host council staff to work alongside volunteers and offer the best advice and guidance to residents in the heart of the community. As an organisation like Al Madina has traffic of over 15,000 residents per week, this is a unique opportunity to work with residents directly.
Accessing space and buildings	The council has actively encouraged the use of all available space in the borough for religious worship, however access to appropriate space remains a constant issue. As communities grow, so do their needs and many organisations are finding it difficult to manage and maintain enough space for their congregations. However, there has been some progress, with some new developments now actively considering faith needs in their planning stages (e.g. Hepworth Gardens) and officers now regularly being asked for input into planning applications referencing faith needs. Alongside this, preliminary engagement opportunities, such as the Thames/Riverside work by Faith Action, has provided a snapshot of the views of the communities to discover changing needs. These will provide important pieces of evidence, to inform and guide our decision making and future direction of travel with regards to policy making. Practically leased community halls, some schools and community hubs across the borough are hired by predominantly Christian and Muslim organisations for religious worship on a weekly basis. Through a concerted effort by the council to engage and establish relationships with faith communities, there is now an emphasis on ensuring that planners take on the views of faith communities when significant development is taking. Hepworth Gardens is an example of this, where the community need has significantly changed over the past 10 years, and the response of the community has driven the need for a dedicated faith/community space. Recently, the Warm Spaces grants have showcased the ability of faith groups to utilise space for purposes other than for what is committed to

	worship. Of the fifteen organisations that received funding, eight of them were faith spaces, which indicates that faith organisations have again recognised the need to continue to expand the offer of their spaces beyond the usual worship and community (realistically congregational) use.
Promoting diverse voices	Linked to the Councils ambition to listen more to the needs of the wider community, we continue to work closely with faith partners to not only promote and offer unique and diverse events, but to ensure we are meeting the needs of those communities in wider service delivery. This includes more community voices actively engaged in consultations, design of services/projects, involved in delivering programmes of work in partnership with the council and other statutory partners and given the confidence and skills to enable organisations to diversify their work. Stand out examples of events that are now run annually include the Eid@Eastbury festival, which was initially run so successfully in 2019 and will now (after an enforced hiatus during covid) form part of councils "Summer of Festivals" programming. Similarly, Eid prayers in the park are now run by more organisations across the borough, and other religious festivals. The cultural partnership now also includes members from the borough faith organisations, who have input into how cultural programming will continue to reflect the diverse communities in the borough. More than this though, through the council committing to working with faith organisations in a more intimate and trustworthy way, through building strategic relationships with faith leaders and utilising the skills and unique pathways provided to us through faith-based networks, we are now reaching more of the people who were before hidden or difficult to reach. This results in services being delivered in a more effective and agile way, which in turn ensures that we are engaging more effectively.
Safeguarding Vulnerable People	Faith organisations have a clear duty of care to those who use their spaces. Not only are they spaces where relationships of trust are built, but also spaces where activity takes place involving more at-risk or vulnerable individuals. We have taken steps to ensure that faith-based organisations have access to good quality training and guidance around safeguarding policy and practice. In 2021, the Council launched a new safeguarding template policy, which was communicated to all faith groups in the borough, alongside a new self-assessment process which can be done alongside the adoption of the new policy. Groups have been encouraged to seek advice and guidance from the council safeguarding team, and engagement has taken place to help groups to ensure best quality practice. The council has also delivered targeted work through community safety programmes, working alongside faith communities to focus on reducing serious youth violence and reducing the impact of gangs, crime and the reach of county lines in the borough. Faith groups have also continuously worked with the council to ensure that vulnerable people are supported. A key example of this is where groups

	have come together in a network to support Ukrainian refugees, working with each other to share resources, connect and support those refugees and refugee sponsors in their local area. Coordinated through triage in Community Solutions, Lifeline Church have also worked with the council to establish a refugee's support network.
Respecting Different Faiths	A key part of this theme was to ensure that the council connected, engaged with and supported the BD Faith Forum. Through the subsequent commencement of, and development, the capacity building contract, the council has shown that it is committed to supporting interfaith connectivity work in the borough. We have continued, where possible, to connect faith leaders and ensure that we celebrate together and encourage messages of support to be shared across different faiths during significant events/religious occasions. There are some landmark points that have been reached, throughout the pandemic faith organisations worked tirelessly to support their communities and this led to partnerships forming between faith organisations. Kingsley Hall and Al Madina Mosque for example, now have a fledgling working relationship, sharing intelligence and resources with each other where they may not have done so in the past. Residents survey data has also indicated a significant upturn in community cohesion in the borough. In answer to a question about people agreeing whether Barking & Dagenham is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, 82% of respondents agreed that it was (2021 residents survey). This is up from 73% in 2016 and indicates that there is an upward trend in this space, and further indicates growing respect and tolerance between residents in the borough.

Looking back – What we have done - Cost of Living

3.2. Following the commencement of the delivery of the contract for 'Capacity Building Support for the Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum', circumstances mean the council is thinking differently about how we utilise resources across the organisation. The cost-of-living crisis looms large for many residents, and we are asking our service providers and partners to think differently with us as we look to support people through the hard times ahead.

3.3. With this in mind, we requested that Faith Action refocus resources and the aims of the Capacity Building Support contract, delivering objectives that reflect the support that faith communities will need more widely with the cost-of-living crisis. This has also required us to change the focus of the contract, with Faith Action working "alongside" the Faith Forum and our faith communities more broadly. The purpose of the council's current cost-of-living support offer is to help individuals through crisis points, via referral pathways provided by locality lead partner organisations, made up of partners from the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFSE). These locality leads are embedded within the local communities and spread across six geographic areas within the borough, responsible for coordinating the support offer across their locality. Many organisations within the VCFSE, will be linked in through the locality leads, creating a support net that will hopefully resolve issues residents will face during the cost-of-living crisis.

3.4. This is a key time for faith communities, who often look to their leaders for guidance, who in turn will need a coordinated approach to standing up the many avenues of support that remain available locally. Whilst the council have promoted initiatives like the Warm Spaces Grants and various support offers that are available through BDMoney and other partner support, there is still a question mark over how we ensure that faith leaders have the knowledge they need to be able to signpost effectively and use their resources effectively.

3.5. We have worked with Faith Action to agree an approach that focuses on the following:

- **Support the council and its partners to reach faith leaders in the borough:** Support the council and the strategically placed locality leads, to reach, engage with and draw support from faith leadership in the borough, working alongside the council to develop relationships.
- **Knowledge and expertise:** To use their knowledge and expertise, to ensure that all faith groups views are represented, allowing solutions to be developed to the Cost-of-Living Crisis that are suitable and sensitive to faith needs, across the breadth and depth of faith communities locally.
- **Convening power**: Use the power of their existing relationships to bring together faith leadership, examining the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on faith communities and exploring solutions to combat it using the identified resources.
- **Amplifying the support**: To amplify the support that faith organisations are already offering and helping them to do it better, utilising their networks to ensure that we are capturing the stories and anecdotal evidence.

3.6. Faith Action have already held the first of these events, a "Cost of Living – Faith Summit", but have been asked to roadmap the next steps and provide support leading into some of the creative thinking mentioned above. It is proposed that the mechanism to encourage and deliver some of this "lateral" thinking, should be the formation of a "Closed Collective" made up of faith leaders from across a range of different faiths and backgrounds in the borough.

3.7. The "Closed Collective" concept is not a new one and derives from types of participatory grant making, where a collection of people have autonomous decision making over how and where to spend a pot of funding. In this case, the funding pot comes from the aforementioned ringfenced funding left over from a completed MHCLG programme and will mean there is £40k of funding for the collective of faith leaders to look at a range of options to address any perceived gaps.

3.8. Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum are an independent organisation and as such, although we can encourage and attempt to steer them towards specific objectives, the organisation governs their own activities and direction as any registered charity would. However, what is apparent is that we need to continue to support and encourage the Faith Forum to achieve our overall ambition for a fully engaged faith network in the borough. Although we are changing the nature of the Capacity Building Contract, we will continue to work alongside the Faith Forum to support them as required.

3.9. More examples of faith work across Barking & Dagenham are included in Appendix 2.

4. Issues and challenges

4.1. There are also significant challenges as well as opportunities within the faith sector.

4.2. We know that some of the tensions in our communities continue to be focused around some of our growing faith communities and places of religious worship. These include the accessible use of spaces and buildings for worship, perceived differences, and tensions

around issues such as planning, parking and noise, concerns centred around cultural and religious practises, safeguarding within our communities and addressing the wider context of health and health inequalities.

4.3.   Faith organisations and the wider faith communities are not immune to experiencing tension and where people of faith tend to identify with their faith on a wider scale, with diaspora communities spread all over the globe, this means that events that happen internationally can have a profound effect on faith communities in the borough.

4.4.   Over the course of the last few years, this has been demonstrated in many different ways, including; hate preachers (most recently, Sadvhi Ritambhura, Anjem Choudary), war (Palestinian/Israeli conflict), acts of terrorism or extremism (Christchurch massacre), violent disorder or protests in other countries (in Hong Kong, or the Sikh Farmers protest). These are just a few examples of events that can cause disturbances in our community.

4.5.   Friction can exist in individual cases on subjects like planning, the promotion of equality and diversity, safeguarding, multi-faith worship space and other multi-faceted sensitive issues. Faith-based extremism and radicalisation remains a threat across the UK, with the emergence of far-right and conspiracy theorist ideologies also posing a new dynamic in terms of threats to children and vulnerable people in the borough. Incidents of conspiracy theorist linked ideological attacks have increased across the globe, as has the threat from the far-right, with recent attacks in Australia, the USA and closer to home with the Dover migrant centre attack.

4.6.   Also, there is still the risk that individuals will use faith organisations as a platform to promote discrimination and examples of this have been seen in the borough e.g. street preachers propagating anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric outside Barking station. Also, faith organisations are spaces where confidential and deeply personal conversations take place, with information shared on the basis of trust. There is inherent risk in this and although all faith organisations/leaders share a moral construct that ensures the retention of (in the vast majority of cases) overall privacy and confidentiality, there is a risk that this trust is extended to individuals who are not as scrupulous and could seek to exploit vulnerable individuals. Most faith organisations are aware of their duty to safeguard vulnerable people, and their links to national structures e.g. the Church of England, Catholic Church, or the Charity Commission, means they must retain appropriate safeguarding policies. However, the risk remains and there needs to be a concerted effort by the faith sector, statutory partners and the council to ensure the wellbeing of all individuals who visit the spaces.

4.7.   Many organisations in the borough have addressed these issues head on choosing to lead where others may follow, and there are overwhelmingly positive examples. Al Madina for example, have delivered a programme of work informing frontline workers about the drivers of extremism and how to spot the signs of radicalisation. Afruca[8] have worked with churches in the area in the past, to address complex issues in safeguarding children, including addressing cultural differences in approaches to physical chastisement. And Faith Associates[9] worked closely with the boroughs Madrassahs to engage with them on safeguarding policy and practice.

---

[8] AFRUCA Safeguarding Children
[9] Faith Associates | Building Standards Across The Globe

4.8.   However, in some communities there is still an underlying suspicion of the work of statutory authorities, which, for example, contributes to overall health inequalities through the mistrust of information. Faith organisations have, for their part, sought to engage and advise the council of the best way forward in this space. In the past, we have relied heavily on our strategic relationships with faith leaders, for their advice and guidance e.g. with the low uptake of winter flu vaccine in Muslim children, where we worked closely with four different Muslim organisations to produce bespoke guidance for parents.

4.9.   As previously mentioned, the changing nature of our faith communities is a significant factor in the ability of officers to continuously engage with specific contacts, with new organisations, leaders, management staff and volunteers shifting constantly across the faith organisations landscape.

4.10.   While much has been achieved, there is much more to be done, with the emerging faith communities changing daily in the borough the need for wider faith engagement work will never diminish.

4.11.   The issues and challenges require a collective effort, both on the part of the council and its various departments, but also in those engaged faith organisations and individuals, to inspire and encourage participation from a much wider pool within the sector.

4.12.   This is something we cannot do alone, or from a position of paternalism and without a current collective engagement vehicle, we must focus on nurturing and supporting the development of existing relationships. We must also ensure that we are supporting new and innovative faith-based social action and provide the mechanisms and spaces to connect leaders and most of all, by working alongside and with faith communities rather than "doing to".

5. Looking ahead and what next

5.1.   Our aim is to continue to work with our changing faith communities in line with the approach and principles set out within Faith Builds Community Policy.

5.2.   The following set out some suggested next steps that we propose the council, with faith organisations seek to take in further strengthening how we best work together:

- Work with faith organisations to review and refresh the Faith Builds Community Policy – this should seek to further consolidate and strengthen its principles, extend its reach through more pledges to follow it, continue to demonstrate how its influence makes a significant and meaningful impact and update the shared actions and commitments that underpin it

- Re-focus and prioritise how we work together on a small number of themes and facilitate wide engagement to inform the development of actions to deliver these. We propose emerging priorities to include:

    o Responding to the cost of living crisis – doing all we can together to provide help and support to residents through the crisis
    o Strengthening community safeguarding – keeping people safe and promoting their wellbeing and welfare in our communities

- o Tackling health inequalities – explore opportunities to enable and empower faith communities to further contribute to improving health and tackling health inequalities
- o Place-shaping – explore the opportunities and practical approaches to strengthen faith engagement in respect of place-shaping and development of inclusive growth aims

- Explore at pace, the opportunity in line with the above priorities, to develop new and creative faith-led forms of engagement that encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities

- Ensure within the Council's Corporate Plan, key supporting strategies and service plans, that working with faith communities is embedded as a priority and that all services are aware of, and able to, connect and engage with faith groups to understand and enhance their contribution to achieving priorities

- Invite faith groups to give awareness training to LBBD staff to help promote inclusion

- Progress the development of specific guidance and principles on how faith groups access and use appropriate spaces that recognises the differences between and within faith groups – doing so in collaboration with faith organisations and drawing on good practice and examples where these exist

- Consider the opportunities that the above may present, for the development or commissioning of a vehicle to manage the coordination of engagement across faith organisations and ensure that they can continue to support residents within their communities and maintain regular and strong links with statutory partners – this should include considering the potential of including faith as part of the wider infrastructure support to the VCSE currently via BD_Collective

Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the proposed next steps and in particular the proposed priority themes and also to suggest other opportunities and ideas on how we work together.

6. **Consultation**

This report is informed by ongoing engagement with Faith Communities and partners. More specifically, in developing our future approach to engagement and working with faith communities, we will seek to engage widely across faith leaders, organisations and communities and to facilitate a space where this can be coordinated.

7. **Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: No comments received

Budgets mentioned have been used from existing ringfenced funding.

8. **Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Dr Paul Field Principal Governance & Standards Solicitor

8.1. In carrying out the Council's functions it must pay due regard to its Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as set out in Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. The PSED provides that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2. The policies, strategies, measures, and activities outlined in this report positively advance the Councils equality obligations as described above.

9. Other Implications

None

9.1. **Risk Management -** None

9.2. **Contractual Issues -** None

9.3. **Staffing Issues -** None

9.4. **Corporate Policy and Equality Impact –** As part of the original launch of the Faith Builds Community Policy, an EIA was completed that explained the Equality Impact alongside a policies and strategies table. Copies of these have been included with this report.

9.5. **Safeguarding Adults and Children –** Faith organisations have a duty to ensure that all users, and in particular vulnerable users are safeguarded against potential harm. Those that are charities will need to ensure that they adhere to the regulations set out by the charity commission, and we will work closely with all organisations to ensure they are up to date with their safeguarding policies and practice.

9.6. **Health Issues –**

The role that faith communities have to play in preserving public health and wellbeing has grown in significance over the past few years. Now more than ever, the wealth and depth of knowledge held by faith leaders and faith institutions is useful in determining a community approach to solving issues including: health inequalities, public health programming placement, vaccine hesitancy and overall access to health and wellbeing support. Many faith organisations are now working proactively in this space, connecting in with local initiatives and health drives, and delivering alongside healthcare professionals. The Public Health team at the council have also worked closely with several faith organisations, using their reach to amplify projects and commissioning several of them to run health projects, including the latest covid vaccine uptake work.

9.7. **Crime and Disorder Issues -** None

9.8. **Property / Asset Issues -** None

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1. Best Practice – Examples in other spaces
- Appendix 2. Other Faith Based Work – In Barking & Dagenham
- Appendix 3. Faith Builds Community Policy – Information Leaflet
- Appendix 4. Faith Builds Community Policy – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 5. Faith Builds Community Policy – Policies and Strategies Table
- Appendix 6. Census Data Pack

The latest Census data is also available here: How life has changed in Barking and Dagenham: Census 2021 (ons.gov.uk)

https://lbbd.sharepoint.com/sites/inttp/MyJob/Pages/Staff-Information.aspx

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 October 2023

Title: Report on the OFSTED Inspection of Children's Services and arrangements for publishing the Council's OFSTED Improvement Plan	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Disabilities	
Open Report	**For Information**
Wards Affected: All	**Key Decision:** No
Report Author: April Bald; Operational Director for Children's Care and Support and Chris Bush; Commissioning Director for Care and Support	**Contact Details:** **Tel:** 0208 227 3188 **E-Mail:** christopher.bush@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Director: April Bald; Operational Director for Children's Care and Support	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Elaine Allegretti; Strategic Director for Children's and Adults	

Summary:

In July the Council was subject to a Standard Inspection under the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) framework. Following initial feedback provided at the conclusion of the inspection the final 'OFSTED Letter' formally setting-out OFSTED's findings was published on 4 September 2023.

This report sets out the headlines from the published findings, including, but not limited to, the 8 named areas for improvement that OFSTED have made.

In response to these recommendations the Council is required to develop and publish an improvement plan by 11 December 2023. This report begins to discuss this plan, though so soon after the publication of the letter this remains a work in progress at this stage.

It is anticipated that once the plan is developed and agreed by the Council a further update – including upon progress – will be made to Overview and Scrutiny in the future, at the Committees' discretion.

Recommendation(s)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

a) Note the findings of the OFSTED ILACS Inspection of Children's Services in July 2023.
b) Note to the publication of the OFSTED Improvement Plan that we are required to produce, and publish, by 11 December 2023.

c) Consider when further scrutiny of this item will be best undertaken in the future.

Reasons

- The OFSTED Improvement Plan is a key plank of the Council's plans to continue improvement to Children's Social Care; and

The Council is required to publish the OFSTED Improvement Plan by 11 December 2023.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Between 3 July 2023 and the 21 July 2023, the Council was subject to a Standard Inspection under the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) framework.

1.2 During this three-week period inspectors met with key officers, including the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services, as well as the Lead Member for Children's Services. The bulk of inspectors time, however, was spent meeting with a wide range of frontline officers observing the direct work and practice of frontline Social Workers as well as reviewing the case files of children and young people.

1.3 Following initial feedback provided at the conclusion of the inspection the final 'OFSTED Letter' formally setting-out OFSTED's findings was published on 4 September 2023. This report sets out the headlines from the published findings, including, but not limited to, the 8 named recommendations that OFSTED have made.

1.4 In response to these recommendations the Council is required to develop and publish an improvement plan by 11 December 2023. So soon after the conclusion of the inspection, this remains a work in progress at the time of writing and will be presented to the Council's Cabinet for ratification prior to publication.

2. The Context of Improvement

2.1 The context within which the findings of the inspection must be considered is not unimportant, and the past four years, since the 2019 inspection, have been some of the most challenging we have experienced. The challenging nature of the wider landscape has been alluded to in the letter from the inspection team, and throughout the inspection this was a topic of discussion.

2.2 Our borough is growing rapidly – 18% since the 2011 census – at the third fastest rate in England and Wales (with a further 7% growth expected by 2025), and we have the highest proportion of our population aged under-16 in the country (26.1%). It is also changing, with the greatest increase in ethnic diversity of all English & Welsh local authorities between the 2011 and 2021 censuses – 18.6 percentage point increase in % non-White British residents.

2.3 The brough has 9,400 (12.8%) lone parent households with dependent children – the highest proportion in England and Wales – and the 4th highest average household size (2.96).

2.4 6 out of 10 households on the borough are deprived (the highest in England and Wales) and 5.6% residents aged 16 and over were unemployed (including full-time students) – 7th highest proportion in England and Wales. 18% of economically inactive residents aged 16 and over have never worked, and the borough has the highest proportion of households in London where at least one person identified as disabled (29.8%).

2.5 These factors alone lead to increasing demand for our statutory service, and that is before we consider the impact of the pandemic during the period since the last inspection, and an increase of 50% at one point in the number of cases open to

Children's Social Care – though this has now receded to a more usual rate of attrition. The current cost of living crisis is also impacting disproportionately upon our residents and, by extension therefore, our services.

2.6 Alongside these factors remains the challenging financial landscape that Council has faced – and continues to face. This is outlined further in the 'financial implications' section of this report.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1 The judgement from the OFSTED inspection is that services for children in Barking and Dagenham 'requires improvement to be good', as was the case at the last inspection.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

3.2 Although services for children requires improvement to be good, OFSTED inspectors reported that there have been improvements since the previous inspection in 2019.

3.3 The report outlines that leaders have an understanding of strengths and weaknesses, commonly referred to as "knowing ourselves". It was acknowledged that action has been taken to increase social work capacity, to help manage demand and give workers more time for direct support for children and families, and that some of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed.

3.4 Inspectors found that the positive impact of leaders is evident in the progress made in a number of important areas for children, and that the senior management team for children's services is stable and has remained consistent – far from a given – though also reported that the service's lean management structure has made it harder to manage the volume of need and provide the essential oversight, direction and supervision required to ensure that children make progress.

3.5 They also observed that leaders are resilient, show fortitude and flexibility, and are creating an enabling, learning culture to support staff development, and that progress in creating an increasingly stable workforce has been hard sought, with purposeful campaigns to recruit staff from overseas, a competitive recruitment package and steps to support career progression.

3.6 Inspectors found that social workers like working in the borough and enjoy the rich diversity and the availability of community resources. There is an enthusiastic approach to training and good opportunities to develop experience and expertise, with a strong offer to support internal career advancement.

3.7 The final comment of the report, perhaps the most notable is that inspectors found that social workers are supported by an open and supportive management team and an environment where practice is beginning to flourish.

Areas of strengths and positive practice

3.8 Within the inspection report, there are many areas of strength and examples of positive practice. A full breakdown of strengths and weaknesses can be found at **Appendix A**, with the following paragraphs providing a summary of the headline findings.

3.9 Children and families were found to have access to a good range of universal and targeted early help provision and Early Help workers complete assessments and plans that are of good quality, so there is effective support for children, with intervention timely. It was noted that we have invested corporate funding to support an ambitious and updated early help strategy, which will involve delivery through new 'family hubs'.

3.10 The MASH engages quickly with families and ensures that parental consent and shared multi-agency information are in place, and most children and families get the right level of help at the right time, and when a more urgent response is required, this is escalated appropriately. The emergency duty team was praised in the inspection and judged as well resourced, experienced, and effective.

3.11 Action is taken for immediate protection of children and assessments are mostly of good quality, and for most children timely, appropriate decisions being made for them and their families. Most assessments, including those for disabled children, are comprehensive, include multi-agency views and are informed by history.

3.12 There is a strong multi-agency approach to contextual safeguarding for children, whether they live at home or are in care. When children go missing, timely strategy meetings result in comprehensive multi-agency risk assessment and safety planning.

3.13 Where successful and timely pre-proceedings are secured, this significantly changes the lived experiences of children, allowing them to live safely with their families without the need to initiate proceedings. For children subject to proceedings, the quality and timeliness of assessments and reports to the family court are improving.

3.14 Local authority designated officer arrangements are effective and ensure that children are adequately safeguarded. We They take robust action to safeguard children who are missing education and any children being educated at home who are vulnerable.

3.15 Once children come into care, they are appropriately matched with carers who meet their cultural and identity needs. - Placement stability is enhanced with

support from the Special Intervention Service (SIS), so that children can remain with consistent carers and gain a sense of security.

3.16 Overall, social workers know their children well and they are significant, consistent people in children's lives. IROs recognise when delays affect children's lives, and the escalation process is becoming increasingly effective so that actions to progress plans are implemented.

3.17 The borough's independent visiting scheme is a real strength. It provides long term stable and committed relationships that add significantly to children's well-being, and the successful recruitment of foster carers is a strength. Managers and staff attract new carers who live within or near to the borough.

3.18 Most health assessments are carried out in a timely manner and result in thorough healthcare plans and sufficient information to ensure that carers can meet children's health needs effectively. Where children have more complex health needs, appropriate assessments inform medication reviews, which are regularly updated to ensure a dynamic response to children's medical needs.

3.19 Committed and dedicated Leaving Care Advisors successfully build nurturing and trusting relationships with care leavers. Pathway plans are collaboratively created with care leavers, reflecting their individuality and their views, wishes and aspirations. Most plans identify and address care leavers' unique needs well.

3.20 Staff routinely undertake risk assessments and care leavers' circumstances are considered by the multi-agency child exploitation panel, thereby coordinating information to inform safety planning, and reducing risk for care leavers. Care leavers' health needs are mostly well considered in their pathway plans.

3.21 There has been a tangible commitment from senior council leaders to improve the quality of children's services with investment to increase social work capacity. Additional social work capacity and recruitment have helped to manage caseloads.

3.22 We have set out clear expectations and practice standards, with guidance from centres of excellence supporting practice in complex areas of social work such as child sexual abuse, child exploitation and homelessness and have introduced a revised quality assurance framework and practice evaluation programme. This has ensured that we have accurate information on the standards of social work practice in the service.

Areas of improvement including the 8 key Ofsted recommendations

3.23 Inspectors concluded that progress is not consistent nor equitable for some children living in the borough. This has prevented the authority from achieving a judgement of good at this inspection. In particular, the pressures on management capacity, which were identified at the last inspection, continue to hinder the oversight and supervision needed to support effective frontline practice. This is evident in a lack of decisive intervention for some children who are exposed to long-term neglect and domestic abuse, and in delays in progressing permanence plans and life-story work for some children in care.

3.24 For a small number of children, thresholds are inconsistently applied, so that families do not receive help that is reflective of their needs when stepped down

from MASH and Strategy meetings in the assessment teams are not always held in a timescale that is consistent with identified risks to children.

3.25   The quality of Child in Need and Child Protection Plans remains variable, and for a small number of number of children, intervention is overoptimistic and does not take account sufficiently of historical concerns to inform future and contingency planning.

3.26   We need to improve the quality and impact of pre-proceedings work undertaken within the Public Law Outline, where consistency is a challenge and practice does not always take enough account of the child's lived experience, and a small number of children wait too long for help and remain in situations which are unstable, potentially harmful and do not provide a sense of security.

3.27   Some children's entry to care comes late, when they have been the subject of repeat interventions and have been living in situations of unaddressed neglect for too long, and permanence planning meetings are not of sufficient quality to enable actions towards achieving timely permanence to be effective.

3.28   Our lean management structure has made it harder to manage the volume of need and provide the essential oversight, direction and supervision required to ensure that children make progress, and the consistent application and embedding of practice pathways are not yet confidently in place, so children are not always benefiting from this practice knowledge.

3.29   We have struggled to ensure consistently timely interventions for children who experience long-term neglect, and this must be a priority area of focus.

What needs to improve?

3.30   In addition to the above, OFSTED identified 8 key recommendations where they felt improvement was most strongly required. These are:

- Timeliness of strategy meetings.
- The capacity, quality, consistency and impact of supervision and management oversight.
- Assessment and decision-making for children experiencing neglect.
- Timeliness of pre-proceedings pathways.
- Consistency of response to 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless.
- Oversight of children's placements in unregistered children's homes.
- Application of threshold in early help.
- Life-story work and permanency planning.

4.   Next Steps: Improvement Plan

4.1   We are required to publish an Improvement Plan by 11 December 2023. This plan should outline our response to the recommendations made by OFSTED, and progress against delivery will be reflected in our Annual Self-Evaluation and monitored by OFSTED at the Annual Engagement Meeting.

4.2   Given that it is so soon after the inspection, our Action Plan is in the process of being drafted and not yet ready for publication – though it is beginning to take shape and, in fact, in some cases – such as improving the processes for oversight of children in unregulated placements – is already being implemented.

4.3   This improvement plan will need to be incorporated into a wider programme of work that is being planned to look at the organisational structure(s) of our services, including the correct positioning of the Targeted Early Help and Children with Disabilities Services that both currently sit outside of the Operational Service Block, and will need to be reincorporated.

4.4   Once completed, the OFSTED Improvement Plan will be presented to Senior Leaders and Members for approval prior to submission on 11th. Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to determine an appropriate point to review the progress made at a future juncture.

5   Consultation

5.1   The OFSTED Improvement Plan is being developed in conjunction with key stakeholders across the Council, including the Lead Member for Children's Services. This included colleagues outside of Children's Care and Support who will play a significant role in delivering the improved outcomes for our children and young people.

5.2   Findings from the inspection will also be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership. Once published the LSCP will be briefed on the part they must play, both now and in future. This Improvement Plan will also be formally presented to the local Health and Wellbeing Board and NEL ICB.

6   Financial Implications

        Implications completed by: Antony Envoldsen-Harris

6.1   This report covers the outcome of the Ofsted inspection with no reference to costs/budgets. As it stands there are no financial implications identified. This is likely to change once the improvement plan has been completed and published, finance would need to review and verify anything presented in that plan.

7   Legal Implications

        Implications completed: Daniel Longe, Principal Solicitor, In-House Advocates Team.

7.1   The report sets out the findings from the recent Ofsted inspection carried out in July 2023. As a result of that inspection, Ofsted have directed the local authority to put together an improvement plan and this report sets out Children's Services' plan in that regard. The contents of this report do not carry any legal implications and are rightly within the scope and framework of the statutory duties imposed under the Children Act 1989.

8.   Other Implications

8.1   Risk Management – there is significant risk in failing to deliver an adequate Children's Service. There are considerable risks to the children and young people who we have a duty to safeguard, as well as the risks to the Council of failing to

adequately discharge statutory duties. As part of our governance and programme management arrangements, risks are being identified and will be managed through this process.

8.2   Staffing Issues – any staffing issues will be outlined in the wider Children's Improvement Programme report when presented.

8.3   Safeguarding – safeguarding children is *the* core focus of the OFSTED Improvement Plan.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of this Report

- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Inspection of Children's Social Care Services (OFSTED Letter) September 2023

List of Appendices

- Appendix A: Summary of Strengths and Areas of Improvement Table

- Appendix B: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Inspection of Children's Social Care Services (OFSTED Letter) September 2023.

Appendix A: LBBD Ofsted ILACS 2023 Strengths and Areas of Improvement

Areas for Improvement	Strengths
EARLY HELP	
• Significantly, for a small number of children, **thresholds in early help are inconsistently applied,** so that families do not receive help that is reflective of their needs when stepped down from MASH.	• Children and families have access to a good range of universal and targeted early help provision. • Early help workers complete assessments and plans that are of good quality, so there is effective support for children. • Plans are informed by direct work undertaken with children and multi-agency information. • Management oversight helps to progress support plans for children and their families. • Intervention is timely. • Children's services leaders have attracted corporate funding to support an ambitious and updated early help strategy, which will involve delivery through new 'family hubs'
MASH	
• Individual staff in the MASH categorise and grade risk using ratings which are not in line with the local authority's threshold- For a small number of children, this results in **responses that are insufficiently focused on their experiences and circumstances**	• Experienced and skilled social workers in the MASH operate a consultation line for professionals, members of the public and children. • Relevant information and advice aid decision-making and support the timely transfer of most children's contacts and referrals to services. • most children and families get the right level of help at the right time. • The MASH engages quickly with families and ensures that parental consent and shared multi-agency information are in place. • MASH triage is mostly efficient and timely. • When a more urgent response is required, managers appropriately pass information directly to the assessment and intervention service for strategy discussions to be held. • Leaders have increased capacity in the MASH, including additional health and education resources. This helps to ensure timely information-gathering, to inform decisions about children's welfare. • health information informs and adds to the assessment of children's needs. • The emergency duty service (EDS) provides a timely, proportionate, and consistent response to children's needs out of hours. • When there are significant concerns for children, EDS holds strategy meetings with the police, to ensure immediate action to safeguard children.
ASSESSMENT INCL PRIVATE FOSTERING	

Strategy meetings in the assessment teams are not always held in a timescale that is consistent with identified risks to children. - Actions agreed in **strategy meetings are not always reviewed-** there are missed opportunities to follow up on their wider needs. - Advertising campaigns to raise the awareness and **profile of private fostering are only written in English.** This limits their effectiveness in reaching some children living in this borough's very diverse communities. - The service's response to children who are **homeless or at risk of becoming homeless does not take sufficient account of children's needs.** - Some homeless children are **not given access to an advocate and independent advice about their housing entitlements,** and some children have been actively discouraged from becoming looked after.	- Senior leaders have challenged partners to address the need for more timely police attendance at strategy meetings, and for health colleagues to ensure access to specialist sexual abuse medicals. - Action is taken for immediate protection of children. - Stronger practice is evident in strategy meetings held in the contextual safeguarding team with timely meetings, with good attendance by police and other multi-agency partners, result in clear actions to progress safety plans which reduce risk for children. - The introduction of a dedicated pre-birth team has provided much-needed additionality in the service. - Assessments undertaken are mostly of good quality. They incorporate risk, evaluate need and secure early decision-making for children, who benefit from effective and timely care planning. - Most children's assessments, including those for disabled children, are comprehensive, include multi-agency views and are informed by history. - for most children timely, appropriate decisions being made for them and their families. - Assessments include information written to the child following direct work. This helps practitioners to get a clear picture of children's development and presenting risks. - Social workers and family support workers have specialist training in Makaton, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and in understanding autistic spectrum disorder. communication with disabled children and a good understanding of their needs - When needed, safeguarding concerns are reduced through child-in-need or child protection plans. - Assessments and visiting for children in private fostering arrangements provide assurance about their care. - For homeless children - Where an offer of accommodation is made, children benefit from an extensive offer of placement choice, including foster placements.

CIN & SAFEGUARDING including EXPLOITATION AND MISSING

- Quality of **child-in-need and child protection plans is variable.** - For a small number of number of children, intervention is **overoptimistic and does not take account sufficiently of historical concerns to inform future and contingency planning.** - Insufficient recognition or **measurable, evaluated social work intervention for children experiencing long term neglect and/or domestic abuse.** - A small number of these children **experience repeated periods of child-in-need or child protection plans without decisive intervention, or sustainable change**	- In most children's cases, including for disabled children, core groups and child in-need meetings are attended by relevant agencies and lead to planning and interventions which are focused on need and help to reduce risks and harm to children. - There is a strong multi-agency approach to contextual safeguarding for children, whether they live at home or are in care. - Information from partners adds to an understanding of locality 'hot spots' and community risks. - Schools respond quickly to ensure that appropriate education is in place, so that exploitation risks for children are reduced. - Careful collation of information and accurate risk analysis guide planned disruption work, which supports the safety of children who are experiencing exploitation or are on the periphery of serious youth violence.

being achieved. Where this is the case, they remain in circumstances that are harmful for too long.	• When children go missing, timely strategy meetings result in comprehensive multi-agency risk assessment and safety planning. • Practitioners keep the wider network around children informed so that the activities, movements, and risks to children are acted on. • Intervention benefits individual children and provides opportunities to reduce community risks. • Return home interviews are offered routinely when children have been missing. These interviews seek to find out where children have been and any associated risks. This information informs risk. • 'Grab pack' assessments which are shared with police and carers, with information shared across and between boroughs where necessary. This helps professionals to understand children's networks and contexts, and to reduce risk of harm.
PRE-PROCEEDINGS and CARE PROCEEDINGS	
• The quality and impact **of pre-proceedings work undertaken within the Public Law Outline, are not consistent**, and practice does not take enough account of the child's lived experience. • A small number of **children wait too long for help** and remain in situations which are unstable, potentially harmful and do not provide a sense of security. • Pre-proceedings processes are sometimes initiated without effective child protection planning having taken place, with appropriate assessments undertaken at an earlier point with some **families are subjected to unnecessary pre proceedings processes**. • Issues with **court capacity and delays create uncertainty** for children, as they wait for hearings to determine decisions about their future.	• Where practice in pre-proceedings is stronger, practitioners and managers work to clear timescales to protect children. • Parenting and risk assessments focus on the child's needs, and swift action is taken when needed to safeguard them. • Where successful and timely pre-proceedings are secured, this significantly changes the lived experiences of children, allowing them to live safely with their families without the need to initiate proceedings. • For children subject to proceedings, the quality and timeliness of assessments and reports to the family court are improving.
LADO and MISSING EDUCATION	
	• Local authority designated officer arrangements are effective and ensure that children are adequately safeguarded. • Professionals have good technical knowledge and understanding of child safeguarding processes in this area of complexity (LADO). This is an area of strength. • Identifying children who are missing education- Professionals liaise frequently across agencies and persistently track children's whereabouts. • They take robust action to safeguard children who are missing education and any children being educated at home who are vulnerable.

CHILDREN IN CARE including PERMANENCE

- Some children's **entry to care comes late when they have been the subject of repeat interventions** and have been living in situations of **unaddressed neglect for too long**.
- Some **enter care in a traumatic and unplanned way.**
- **Permanence planning meetings are not held frequently enough.**
- PPM's are **not of sufficient quality** to enable actions towards achieving timely permanence to be effective.
- The council's **permanency panel does not have the strategic overview** needed to track the permanency needs of all children who are looked after. This leads to an inconsistent response for children.
- The **effectiveness of visits to** children in care is mixed.
- Some **Care plans are not updated with sufficient frequency** to reflect changes in children's needs and circumstances.
- Social worker visits, IRO scrutiny and managemen**t oversight for the very small number of children placed in unregistered children's homes are not sufficiently robust.**
- Some **children who need adoption wait too long** for decisions to be made about where they will live.
- **Life-story work is variable.** There is inequality in children's access to life-story work.

- Once children come into care, they are appropriately matched with carers who meet their cultural and identity needs.
- Placement stability is enhanced with support from the Special Intervention Service (SIS), so that children can remain with consistent carers and gain a sense of security.
- Decision-making for children who return home is based on an up-to-date assessment, is consistent with children's needs and leads to appropriate support.
- In stronger and more recent Permanence practice, planning is more clearly focused on the child's future.
- Direct work provides insight into their important relationships.
- Permanency planning, where it is making a difference, assists in care planning considerations and supports effective matching with appropriate carers where children can live long term.
- Visits to children are regular and stepped up if this is in line with their needs.
- Better visits purposefully engaging children with direct work and creative activities, such as baking or going out for meals and activities.
- Overall, social workers know their children well and they are significant, consistent people in children's lives.
- Family time is supported well, so that children are assisted to feel settled but also connected to their families.
- Arrangements for family time are considered thoughtfully and supported well by a specialist contact service, including for children placed out of the area.
- Most reviews are timely and involve important people in children's lives, with children able to attend and express their views.
- When children do not wish to attend, their views are consistently sought by IROs.
- Recommendations from reviews are well written to children.
- Children's plans are well constructed and include relevant actions that enhance their well-being.
- The borough's independent visiting scheme is a real strength. It provides long term stable and committed relationships that add significantly to children's well-being.
- IROs recognise when delays affect children's lives, and the escalation process is becoming increasingly effective so that actions to progress plans are implemented.
- The successful recruitment of foster carers is a strength.
- Managers and staff attract new carers who live within or near to the borough.
- More opportunities for children to live near to their homes and schools, with most children living in fostering homes.
- Foster carers are well supported by their supervising social workers. This is contributing to stable homes for children, who build relationships over time with their carers.
- Mockingbird supportive units is a strength of the service.

- The placement support provided by the SIS, are successfully building and sustaining relationships for children in foster care. This is having a positive impact on placement stability and allows children to build sustained relationships with their carers.
- All foster carers have access to support from other carers and this helps to create a robust network, enhancing stability for children.
- support groups are helping provide important networks for connected carers.
- Children's health needs are also met well.
- Most health assessments are carried out in a timely manner.
- Thorough healthcare plans and sufficient information to ensure that carers can meet children's health needs effectively.
- Where children have more complex health needs, appropriate assessments inform medication reviews, which are regularly updated to ensure a dynamic response to children's medical needs.
- Children benefit from a bespoke therapeutic offer, which results in improved emotional well-being and corresponding lower scores on the strengths and difficulties questionnaire.
- When children can live within their family networks, assessments provide information to ensure safe care for children, which is secured through the most appropriate legal framework.
- When necessary, friends and family carers are provided with legal representation, so they have independent advice to scrutinise support plans.
- Children in care who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children benefit from forming trusting and positive relationships with their social workers.
- Workers visit UASC's them regularly and undertake creative direct work to get to know them and understand their needs and wishes.
- Most children's diverse cultural needs are well met, and matching with carers considers their identity needs.
- An increase in the capacity of the virtual school has assisted with improving the educational attainment for children in care.
- Children are provided with additional support to better achieve in school, and the virtual school works effectively to avoid exclusions.
- Children benefit from personal education plans that are regularly updated to track educational progress and ensure that children have access to leisure interests and activities.
- Most children make progress from their starting points when they enter care.
- Work closely with the regional adoption agency to ensure that the agency understands the needs of the children in the borough and finds adoptive parents for them.
- Early permanence planning is increasingly embedded and successful.
- For some children, particularly those who access the SIS, creative, meaningful, and important life-story work is available, and it makes a significant difference to them, providing opportunities to build trusting and stable relationships with key adults and brothers and sisters.

CARE LEAVERS

Assigning an LCA to care leavers at 17 and a half years provides insufficient time to consistently accomplish meaningful work to promote young people's life skills, build strong relationships before their 18th birthdays and ensure a smooth transition to the leaving care service. **Sexual health needs are not consistently addressed** in care leavers' pathway plans. - They do **not consistently have access to their health histories.** **Not all care leavers are aware of the local offer.**	- Committed and dedicated LCAs successfully build nurturing and trusting relationships with care leavers. - Pathway plans are enhanced by LCAs' understanding of young people's culture and identity, and support care leavers to navigate the crucial steps towards independent living. - Staff visit care leavers regularly and do so more frequently when the young people have greater needs. - Visits are well documented and conducted with sensitivity, leading to meaningful conversations about care leavers' current circumstances and needs. - Pathway plans are collaboratively created with care leavers, reflecting their individuality and their views, wishes and aspirations. - Most plans identify and address care leavers' unique needs well. - They include steps to ensure that care leavers have essential documents like passports and birth certificates. - The importance of safe contact with significant individuals in care leavers' lives is recognised and promoted, positively strengthening their sense of identity. - Pathway plans contain well-written and compassionate letters written by team managers that focus on young people's achievements and positive progress. These letters support care leavers' meaningful engagement and create additional connectivity with the service. - Staff routinely undertake risk assessments. - Care leavers' circumstances are considered by the multi-agency child exploitation panel, thereby coordinating information to inform safety planning, and reducing risk for care leavers. - Care leavers' health needs are mostly well considered in their pathway plans. - Care leavers have access to a range of services that support their physical health and emotional well-being. - The local offer sets out practical and financial support and entitlements. - LCAs advocate for care leavers and successfully provide access to their entitlements. - Care leavers have opportunities to influence the design of services through their various platforms for participation, such as the Skittlz along with the local creative art project, 'you said, we did' feedback and a forum to communicate with the council's top 80 managers. - Most care leavers receive positive support tailored to their specific needs, to enable them to be ambitious and aspirational in their education. This includes help with accessing work experience, apprenticeships, and further and higher education. - Care leavers who are parents benefit from parenting support and advice, information on parenting classes and the option to attend baby groups linked to the borough's early help offer. - The provision of stable accommodation helps these young parents to integrate into the community and become successful parents. - Care leavers who are asylum seekers are supported well to meet their identity, religious and cultural needs.

- Practitioners make good use of interpreters, to ensure that they have a clear understanding of young people's wishes, help them to understand their legal rights and support them with their asylum applications.
- Persistent LCAs provide dedicated support to vulnerable young people, securing appropriate accommodation and preventing homelessness.
- Regular check-ins through various communication channels maintain a protective relationship for young people, keeping in touch even in challenging circumstances.
- The accommodation needs of care leavers, including those who are coming out of custody, are well met.
- A significant number of care leavers secure tenancies in housing association properties, enabling their move into independent accommodation.
- Tenancy support helps to prevent tenancy breakdown.
- Practical, emotional, and budgeting assistance also helps care leavers manage their finances and transition to adulthood successfully.
- An active Children in Care Council provides effective challenge to elected members and the senior officers, to strengthen the corporate parenting offer.
- Children in care and care leavers are heard.
- They are provided with mentoring and have opportunities through local cultural events to be creative in art and drama.

IMPACT OF LEADERS

- The **service's lean management** structure has made it harder to manage the volume of need and provide the **essential oversight, direction** and supervision required to ensure that children make progress. - **Consistent application and embedding of practice pathways** are not yet confidently in place, so children are not always benefiting from this practice knowledge. - Senior managers have struggled to ensure **consistently timely interventions for children who experience long-term neglect.** - **Supervision it is not consistently in place and effective across all social work teams**- where supervision is less effective, children's plans stagnate because there is a lack of impactful management direction.	- A significant proportion of the council's budget is allocated to children's services. This assists in the response to a rapidly increasing child population. - There has been a tangible commitment from senior council leaders to improve the quality of children's services with investment to increase social work capacity. - Additional social work capacity and recruitment have helped to manage caseloads. - The senior management team for children's services is stable and has been consistent since the last inspection in 2019. - The positive impact of leaders is evident in the progress made in several important areas for children. - The borough's senior leaders have also positively impacted on partnership working with the additional investment in the MASH. - There have been challenge and escalation to health and police partners and this focused approach shows impact, with timescales and responses to children's needs improving. - Leaders have set out clear expectations and practice standards, with guidance from centres of excellence supporting practice in complex areas of social work such as child sexual abuse, child exploitation and homelessness. - Supervision is better in some services, for example in the leaving care and specialist intervention services.

	- Introduced a revised quality assurance framework and practice evaluation programme. This has ensured that they have accurate information on the standards of social work practice in the service. - Leaders are resilient, show fortitude and flexibility, - are creating an enabling, learning culture to support staff development. - They value social workers as one of the local authority's best assets. - The reduction in number of social work vacancies is to be commended. - The progress in creating an increasingly stable workforce has been hard sought, with purposeful campaigns to recruit staff from overseas, a competitive recruitment package and steps to support career progression. - Children's leaders have integrated children's voices and experiences into practice. - They have found innovative ways to seek feedback from children who go missing or who have experienced exploitation. - All staff are passionate about improving the lives of the children and young people they support. - They advocate for them and offer valuable advice and guide families to access financial support, helping to reduce the impact of poverty on their children. - Social workers like working in the borough and enjoy the rich diversity and the availability of community resources. - There is an enthusiastic approach to training and good opportunities to develop experience and expertise, with a strong offer to support internal career advancement. - Social workers are supported by an open and supportive management team and an environment where practice is beginning to flourish.

Inspection of Barking and Dagenham children's services

Inspection dates: 10 to 21 July 2023

Lead inspector: Naintara Khosla, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

There have been improvements since the previous inspection of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham children's services in 2019, although overall services still require improvement to be good. Children's leaders have an understanding of service strengths and weaknesses. They have instigated and invested in a number of innovations. They have taken action to increase social work capacity, to help manage demand and give workers more time for direct support for children and families. They have addressed some of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, including engagement from the multi-agency partnership, responses to episodes of going missing from care and planning for children placed with their parents under a care order. They have continued to build effective support for children at risk of extra-familial harm and for care leavers.

However, progress is not consistent nor equitable for some children living in the borough. This has prevented the authority from achieving a judgement of good at this inspection. In particular, the pressures on management capacity, which were identified at the last inspection, continue to hinder the oversight and supervision needed to support effective frontline practice. This is evident in a lack of decisive intervention for some children who are exposed to long-term neglect and domestic

abuse, and in delays in progressing permanence plans and life-story work for some children in care.

What needs to improve?

■ Timeliness of strategy meetings.

■ The capacity, quality, consistency and impact of supervision and management oversight.

■ Assessment and decision-making for children experiencing neglect.

■ Timeliness of pre-proceedings pathways.

■ Consistency of response to 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless.

■ Oversight of children's placements in unregistered children's homes.

■ Application of threshold in early help.

■ Life-story work and permanency planning.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: requires improvement to be good

1. Children and families have access to a good range of universal and targeted early help provision. Early help workers complete assessments and plans that are of good quality, so there is effective support for children. Plans are informed by direct work undertaken with children and multi-agency information. Management oversight helps to progress support plans for children and their families. Intervention is timely. Children's services leaders have attracted corporate funding to support an ambitious and updated early help strategy, which will involve delivery through new 'family hubs', but it is too soon to evaluate its impact.

2. Experienced and skilled social workers in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) operate a consultation line for professionals, members of the public and children. Relevant information and advice aid decision-making and support the timely transfer of most children's contacts and referrals to services. This ensures that most children and families get the right level of help at the right time. Significantly, for a small number of children, thresholds in early help are inconsistently applied, so that families do not receive help that is reflective of their needs when stepped down from MASH.

3. The MASH engages quickly with families and ensures that parental consent and shared multi-agency information are in place. MASH triage is mostly efficient and timely. When a more urgent response is required, managers appropriately pass information directly to the assessment and intervention service for strategy discussions to be held.

4. Individual staff in the MASH categorise and grade risk using ratings which are not in line with the local authority's threshold documentation. For a small

number of children, this results in responses that are insufficiently focused on their experiences and circumstances.

5. Leaders have increased capacity in the MASH, including additional health and education resources. This helps to ensure timely information-gathering, to inform decisions about children's welfare. Therefore, health information informs and adds to the assessment of children's needs. Education staff have also recently been recruited to the MASH, although it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this change.

6. The emergency duty service (EDS) provides a timely, proportionate and consistent response to children's needs out of hours. When there are significant concerns for children, EDS holds strategy meetings with the police, to ensure immediate action to safeguard children.

7. Strategy meetings in the assessment teams are not always held in a timescale that is consistent with identified risks to children. Senior leaders have challenged partners to address the need for more timely police attendance at strategy meetings, and for health colleagues to ensure access to specialist sexual abuse medicals.

8. Actions agreed in strategy meetings are not always reviewed. Action is taken for immediate protection, but for some children there are missed opportunities to follow up on their wider needs. Stronger practice is evident in strategy meetings held in the contextual safeguarding team. Here, timely meetings, with good attendance by police and other multi-agency partners, result in clear actions to progress safety plans which reduce risk for children.

9. The introduction of a dedicated pre-birth team has provided much-needed additionality in the service. Assessments undertaken are mostly of good quality. They incorporate risk, evaluate need and secure early decision-making for children, who benefit from effective and timely care planning.

10. Most children's assessments, including those for disabled children, are comprehensive, include multi-agency views and are informed by history. Consequently, for most children, this results in timely, appropriate decisions being made for them and their families. Assessments include information written to the child following direct work. This helps practitioners to get a clear picture of children's development and presenting risks. Social workers and family support workers have specialist training in Makaton, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and in understanding autistic spectrum disorder. This supports communication with disabled children and a good understanding of their needs. When needed, safeguarding concerns are reduced through child-in-need or child protection plans.

11. In most children's cases, including for disabled children, core groups and child-in-need meetings are attended by relevant agencies and lead to planning and

interventions which are focused on need and help to reduce risks and harm to children.

12. However, the quality of child-in-need and child protection plans is variable. The range of interventions they involve, regularity of review and their impact for children are inconsistent. For a small number of children, intervention is over-optimistic and does not take account sufficiently of historical concerns to inform future and contingency planning. Specifically, there is insufficient recognition or measurable, evaluated social work intervention for children experiencing long-term neglect and/or domestic abuse. As a result, a small number of these children experience repeated periods of child-in-need or child protection plans without decisive intervention, or sustainable change being achieved. Where this is the case, they remain in circumstances that are harmful for too long.

13. There is a strong multi-agency approach to contextual safeguarding for children, whether they live at home or are in care. Information from partners adds to an understanding of locality 'hot spots' and community risks. Schools respond quickly to ensure that appropriate education is in place, so that exploitation risks for children are reduced. Careful collation of information and accurate risk analysis guide planned disruption work, which supports the safety of children who are experiencing exploitation or are on the periphery of serious youth violence.

14. When children go missing, timely strategy meetings result in comprehensive multi-agency risk assessment and safety planning. Practitioners keep the wider network around children informed so that the activities, movements and risks to children are acted on. Intervention benefits individual children and provides opportunities to reduce community risks.

15. Return home interviews are offered routinely when children have been missing. These interviews seek to find out where children have been and any associated risks. This information informs risk and 'grab pack' assessments which are shared with police and carers, with information shared across and between boroughs where necessary. This helps professionals to understand children's networks and contexts, and to reduce risk of harm.

16. Assessments and visiting for children in private fostering arrangements provide assurance about their care. However, advertising campaigns to raise the awareness and profile of private fostering are only written in English. This limits their effectiveness in reaching some children living in this borough's very diverse communities.

17. The service's response to children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless does not take sufficient account of children's needs. Where an offer of accommodation is made, children benefit from an extensive offer of placement choice, including foster placements. However, some children are not given access to an advocate and independent advice about their entitlements,

and some children have been actively discouraged from becoming looked after. Senior leaders took action during the inspection to address this.

18. The quality and impact of pre-proceedings work undertaken within the Public Law Outline, are not consistent, and practice does not take enough account of the child's lived experience. With timescales over 40 weeks, a small number of children wait too long for help and remain in situations which are unstable, potentially harmful and do not provide a sense of security. Pre-proceedings processes are sometimes initiated without effective child protection planning having taken place, with appropriate assessments undertaken at an earlier point. This means that some families are subjected to unnecessary pre-proceedings processes.

19. Where practice in pre-proceedings is stronger, practitioners and managers work to clear timescales to protect children. Parenting and risk assessments focus on the child's needs, and swift action is taken when needed to safeguard them. Where successful and timely pre-proceedings are secured, this significantly changes the lived experiences of children, allowing them to live safely with their families without the need to initiate proceedings.

20. Local authority designated officer arrangements are effective and ensure that children are adequately safeguarded. Professionals have good technical knowledge and understanding of child safeguarding processes in this area of complexity. This is an area of strength and is seen as such by education partners.

21. Identifying children who are missing education is challenging in a borough with such a transient population. Professionals liaise frequently across agencies and persistently track children's whereabouts. They take robust action to safeguard children who are missing education and any children being educated at home who are vulnerable.

The experiences and progress of children in care: requires improvement to be good

22. Some children's entry to care comes late, when they have been the subject of repeat interventions and have been living in situations of unaddressed neglect for too long. Some enter care in a traumatic and unplanned way.

23. Once children come into care, they are appropriately matched with carers who meet their cultural and identity needs. Placement stability is enhanced with support from the Special Intervention Service (SIS), so that children can remain with consistent carers and gain a sense of security.

24. Decision-making for children who return home is based on an up-to-date assessment, is consistent with children's needs and leads to appropriate support.

25. For children subject to proceedings, the quality and timeliness of assessments and reports to the family court are improving. However, as senior leaders have recognised, there is still more to do. Issues with court capacity and delays create uncertainty for children, as they wait for hearings to determine decisions about their future.

26. Permanence planning is ineffective for some children. Permanence planning meetings are not held frequently enough or are not of sufficient quality to enable actions towards achieving timely permanence to be effective. The council's permanency panel does not have the strategic overview needed to track the permanency needs of all children who are looked after. This leads to an inconsistent response for children. In stronger and more recent practice, planning is more clearly focused on the child's future, direct work provides insight into their important relationships and family time is supported well, so that children are assisted to feel settled but also connected to their families. Permanency planning, where it is making a difference, assists in care planning considerations and supports effective matching with appropriate carers where children can live long term.

27. Visits to children are regular and stepped up if this is in line with their needs. The effectiveness of visits is mixed, with better visits purposefully engaging children with direct work and creative activities, such as baking or going out for meals and activities. Overall, social workers know their children well and they are significant, consistent people in children's lives. Arrangements for family time are considered thoughtfully and supported well by a specialist contact service, including for children placed out of the area.

28. Most reviews are timely and involve important people in children's lives, with children able to attend and express their views. When children do not wish to attend, their views are consistently sought by independent reviewing officers (IROs). Recommendations from reviews are well written to children. Children's plans are well constructed and include relevant actions that enhance their well-being. Some plans are not updated with sufficient frequency to reflect changes in children's needs and circumstances.

29. The borough's independent visiting scheme is a real strength. It provides long-term stable and committed relationships that add significantly to children's well-being.

30. IROs recognise when delays affect children's lives, and the escalation process is becoming increasingly effective so that actions to progress plans are implemented.

31. The successful recruitment of foster carers is a strength. Placement sufficiency has been a focus for the borough and is a national challenge. In this context, leaders have successfully increased the recruitment of foster carers. Managers and staff attract new carers who live within or near to the borough. This

creates more opportunities for children to live near to their homes and schools, with most children living in fostering homes.

32. Foster carers are well supported by their supervising social workers. This is contributing to stable homes for children, who build relationships over time with their carers.

33. The ongoing development of groups of foster carers working in supportive units is a strength of the service. This, and the placement support provided by the SIS, are successfully building and sustaining relationships for children in foster care. This is having a positive impact on placement stability and allows children to build sustained relationships with their carers. All foster carers have access to support from other carers and this helps to create a robust network, enhancing stability for children. While networks for connected carers have been more informal, embryonic support groups are helping provide important networks for carers.

34. Children's health needs are also met well. Most health assessments are carried out in a timely manner. They result in thorough healthcare plans and sufficient information to ensure that carers can meet children's health needs effectively. Where children have more complex health needs, appropriate assessments inform medication reviews, which are regularly updated to ensure a dynamic response to children's medical needs. Children benefit from a bespoke therapeutic offer, which results in improved emotional well-being and corresponding lower scores on the strengths and difficulties questionnaire.

35. When children are able to live within their family networks, assessments provide information to ensure safe care for children, which is secured through the most appropriate legal framework. When necessary, friends and family carers are provided with legal representation so they have independent advice to scrutinise support plans.

36. Children in care who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children benefit from forming trusting and positive relationships with their social workers. Workers visit them regularly and undertake creative direct work to get to know them and understand their needs and wishes. Most children's diverse cultural needs are well met, and matching with carers considers their identity needs.

37. An increase in the capacity of the virtual school has assisted with improving the educational attainment for children in care. Children are provided with additional support to better achieve in school, and the virtual school works effectively to avoid exclusions.

38. Children benefit from personal education plans that are regularly updated to track educational progress and ensure that children have access to leisure interests and activities. Most children make progress from their starting points when they enter care.

39. Social worker visits, IRO scrutiny and management oversight for the very small number of children placed in unregistered children's homes are not sufficiently robust. Leaders took immediate remedial action during the inspection to scrutinise these placements and comply with the relevant practice guidance.

40. The recruitment, assessment and training for adopters are now delivered by the regional adoption agency (Adopt London East). Barking and Dagenham works closely with the regional adoption agency to ensure that the agency understands the needs of the children in the borough and finds adoptive parents for them. Early permanence planning is increasingly embedded and successful. However, some children who need adoption wait too long for decisions to be made about where they will live.

41. Life-story work is variable. For some children, particularly those who access the SIS, creative, meaningful and important life-story work is available and it makes a significant difference to them, providing opportunities to build trusting and stable relationships with key adults and brothers and sisters.

42. There is inequality in children's access to life-story work. Those who do not receive appropriate direct work to understand their journey into care and their early family experiences are not enabled to have a good sense of their identity.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

43. The local name for personal advisers is leaving care advisor (LCA). Committed and dedicated LCAs successfully build nurturing and trusting relationships with care leavers. Pathway plans are enhanced by LCAs' understanding of young people's culture and identity, and support care leavers to navigate the crucial steps towards independent living.

44. Staff visit care leavers regularly, and do so more frequently when the young people have greater needs. These visits are well documented and conducted with sensitivity, leading to meaningful conversations about care leavers' current circumstances and needs.

45. The current practice of assigning an LCA to care leavers at 17 and a half years provides insufficient time to consistently accomplish meaningful work to promote young people's life skills, build strong relationships before their 18th birthdays and ensure a smooth transition to the leaving care service.

46. Pathway plans are collaboratively created with care leavers, reflecting their individuality and their views, wishes and aspirations. Most plans identify and address care leavers' unique needs well. They include steps to ensure that care leavers have essential documents like passports and birth certificates. The importance of safe contact with significant individuals in care leavers' lives is recognised and promoted, positively strengthening their sense of identity.

47. Pathway plans contain well-written and compassionate letters written by team managers that focus on young people's achievements and positive progress.

These letters support care leavers' meaningful engagement and create additional connectivity with the service.

48. Staff routinely undertake risk assessments. Where relevant, care leavers' circumstances are considered by the multi-agency child exploitation panel, thereby coordinating information to inform safety planning and reducing risk for care leavers.

49. Care leavers' health needs are mostly well considered in their pathway plans. As a result, care leavers have access to a range of services that support their physical health and emotional well-being. However, sexual health needs are not consistently addressed in care leavers' pathway plans and they do not consistently have access to their health histories.

50. The local offer sets out practical and financial support and entitlements. While not all care leavers are aware of the local offer, LCAs advocate for care leavers and successfully provide access to their entitlements.

51. Care leavers have opportunities to influence the design of services through their various platforms for participation, such as the Skittlz along with the local creative art project, 'you said, we did' feedback and a forum to communicate with the council's top 80 managers. This ensures that practical actions are taken to enhance the council's corporate parenting role.

52. Most care leavers receive positive support tailored to their specific needs, to enable them to be ambitious and aspirational in their education. This includes help with accessing work experience, apprenticeships, and further and higher education.

53. Care leavers who are parents benefit from parenting support and advice, information on parenting classes and the option to attend baby groups linked to the borough's early help offer. The provision of stable accommodation helps these young parents to integrate into the community and become successful parents.

54. Care leavers who are asylum seekers are supported well to meet their identity, religious and cultural needs. Practitioners make good use of interpreters, to ensure that they have a clear understanding of young people's wishes, help them to understand their legal rights and support them with their asylum applications.

55. Persistent LCAs provide dedicated support to vulnerable young people, securing appropriate accommodation and preventing homelessness. Regular check-ins through various communication channels maintain a protective relationship for young people, keeping in touch even in challenging circumstances.

56. The accommodation needs of care leavers, including those who are coming out of custody, are well met. A significant number of care leavers secure tenancies in housing association properties, enabling their move into independent

accommodation. Tenancy support helps to prevent tenancy breakdown. Practical, emotional and budgeting assistance also helps care leavers manage their finances and transition to adulthood successfully.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: requires improvement to be good

57. A significant proportion of the council's budget is allocated to children's services. This assists in the response to a rapidly increasing child population. There has been a tangible commitment from senior council leaders to improve the quality of children's services with investment to increase social work capacity.

58. Despite council investment since the last inspection, overall effectiveness of services still requires improvement to be good. Additional social work capacity and recruitment have helped to manage caseloads. However, leaders are acutely aware that the service's lean management structure has made it harder to manage the volume of need and provide the essential oversight, direction and supervision required to ensure that children make progress.

59. The senior management team for children's services is stable and has been consistent since the last inspection in 2019. The positive impact of leaders is evident in the progress made in a number of important areas for children, including managing workforce capacity, responses for children who are missing from care and/or at risk of exploitation, children placed with parents and young people in the leaving care service.

60. The borough's senior leaders have also positively impacted on partnership working with the additional investment in the MASH. There have been challenge and escalation to health and police partners and this focused approach shows impact, with timescales and responses to children's needs improving. Leaders have set out clear expectations and practice standards, with guidance from centres of excellence supporting practice in complex areas of social work such as child sexual abuse, child exploitation and homelessness. However, consistent application and embedding of practice pathways are not yet confidently in place, so children are not always benefiting from this practice knowledge.

61. Senior managers have struggled in particular to ensure consistently timely interventions for children who experience long-term neglect or unstable home environments and provide a timely response secured with evaluative, evidence-based social work practice in place. This means that a small number of children are left for too long in situations of potential harm before decisive action is taken.

62. While supervision is better in some services, for example in the leaving care and specialist intervention services, it is not consistently in place and effective across all social work teams. Where supervision is less effective, children's plans

stagnate because there is a lack of impactful management direction. This is hindering provision of an equitable service for all children.

63. Since the last inspection, leaders have introduced a revised quality assurance framework and practice evaluation programme. This has ensured that they have accurate information on the standards of social work practice in the service.

64. Leaders are resilient, show fortitude and flexibility, and are creating an enabling, learning culture to support staff development. They value social workers as one of the local authority's best assets. Recruitment of social workers is set within the context of a national shortage, so that the reduction in number of social work vacancies is to be commended. The progress in creating an increasingly stable workforce has been hard sought, with purposeful campaigns to recruit staff from overseas, a competitive recruitment package and steps to support career progression.

65. An active Children in Care Council provides effective challenge to elected members and the senior officers, to strengthen the corporate parenting offer. Children in care and care leavers are heard. They are provided with mentoring and have opportunities through local cultural events to be creative in art and drama.

66. Children's leaders have integrated children's voices and experiences into practice. In particular, they have found innovative ways to seek feedback from children who go missing or who have experienced exploitation.

67. In a borough with particularly high levels of deprivation and migrant families, social workers, early help staff, LCAs and managers are passionate about improving the lives of the children and young people they support. They advocate for them and are acutely aware of the impact the current cost of living crisis and deprivation are having on families in the borough. They offer valuable advice and guide families to access financial support, helping to reduce the impact of poverty on their children.

68. Social workers like working in the borough, and enjoy the rich diversity and the availability of community resources. There is an enthusiastic approach to training and good opportunities to develop experience and expertise, with a strong offer to support internal career advancement. Social workers are supported by an open and supportive management team and an environment where practice is beginning to flourish.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This report is available at https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023

Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Work Programme 2023/24

Officers must ensure reports are cleared by the relevant internal board and include legal and financial implications at least

Meeting	Agenda Items	Officer(s)	Cabinet Member/ Presenter	Executive Board Deadline	Governance Service's Final Deadline
8 November 2023	Flytipping	Rebecca Johnson	Councillor Haroon	12pm, Thursday 12 October	12pm, Friday 27 October
	The Housing Offer for Vulnerable Groups	Chris Bush and Rebecca Ellsmore	Councillor Worby and Councillor Ashraf		
5 December 2023	Metropolitan Police Item (Update on actions arising from Baroness Casey Review/progress of Metropolitan Police Turnaround Plan)	Borough Commander/Superintendent Rhodes/Gary Jones	Councillor Ghani	12pm, Thursday 9 November	12pm, Friday 24 November
	Medium-term Financial Plan	Strategic Director Finance	Councillor Twomey		
24 January 2024	Budget Scrutiny	Strategic Director Finance	Councillor Twomey	12pm, Thursday 14 December	12pm, Friday 12 January
	BDTP and BDMS Update Report	Leona Menville			

			Councillor Ashraf		
14 February 2024	Compliance Update Report: 2 years on (from self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing)	Leona Menville	Councillor Ashraf	12pm, Thursday 18 January	12pm, Friday 2 February
13 March 2024	TBC			12pm, Thursday 15 February	12pm, Friday 1 March
17 April 2024	TBC			12pm, Thursday 21 March	12pm, Friday 5 April
12 June 2024	Update: How are we incorporating Race & Social Justice work into our schools' education programmes? Update: Quality of Schools' Recovery Post Covid-19	Jane Hargreaves/Natasha Cock/Martin Russell/Ben Spinks Jill Baker/Jane Hargreaves	Councillor Kangethe	12pm, Thursday 16 May	12pm, Friday 31 May