Young Inspectors report on supporting teenagers
This report is a summary of the findings by the Young Inspectors Team 2016

1. Who are the Young Inspectors?
The Young Inspectors is a group of people aged 16–21. Every year a team of young inspectors undertake research into the views of other service users and professionals about the services provided by the Council and partner agencies to safeguard children.
The Young Inspectors are selected through an interview process and are involved in designing and conducting each inspection. The strength of Young Inspectors is that they can apply their own experience and knowledge of children’s services to the inspection.

2. Why did Young Inspectors inspect services supporting teenagers?
Camden is concerned that increasing numbers of teenagers are presenting to services as a result of crises (including family breakdown, emotional problems, sexual exploitation and risky behaviour such as drug and alcohol misuse) and that services are not addressing the issues effectively enough.
In 2015/16 Camden’s statistics showed us that young people aged 13+ were the largest group receiving support from services: 26% of all children subject to a child protection plan and 67% of all children looked after were aged 13+.
The Young Inspectors team of 2016 sought to research how Camden works with teenagers and to establish how effective the support is from the perspective of young people, parents and professionals.

3. How did the Young Inspectors get the information?
The team of Young Inspectors focused on gathering information on the following key services for young people: social work, family support and youth offending services. The information was collected by:
• Obtaining feedback via questionnaires from parents, young people and professionals about their opinions on the current services in Camden and how they could be improved by distributing questionnaires.
• Obtaining feedback from service managers and social workers through a series of interviews.
• Undertaking desktop research by reviewing Camden’s Assessment guidance and threshold criteria, Camden’s Resilient Families and comparable studies from other local authorities and the DFE.
• Conducting a focus group of young people to gain further information about their opinions on the current services in Camden.
• Visiting the Hive base for young adults, aged 16-24, which offers support with mental health and wellbeing.
Young people’s views

The most commonly identified issues facing teenagers were:

1. Poor relationships with family
2. Drug use
3. Emotional problems
4. Self-harm
5. Offending

When you got support from the service was the help given at the right time or was it too late?

- It was too late (40%)
- It was when I needed help (60%)

Did the help you were given make a difference?

- Yes (100%)
- No (0%)

Please say what that difference was:
- Peace of mind
- It got me thinking to prepare for the future
- The help from my social worker gave me emotional stability
- Helping me to understand how to manage money
- I am a better person now
- I am more mature and independent
- I got a place on an apprenticeship scheme and I am applying for jobs now
- Improved my relationship with parents

Did you get the help you needed?

- No (13%)
- Yes (87%)

What could have been done differently to make sure the help you received was better?

- Keeping in touch with service users
- Building a good relationship between workers and the young person
- Good communication
Young people’s views

For how long should services support you?
• As long as it is needed and it is easily accessible
• Always want to be able to contact social workers for support or just to speak
• Continued support beyond the age of 18 if the support is needed
• Having options to reduce the amount of support depending on evaluation (whether young person was ready or not)
• People have different needs so the time scale on how long support is needed changes depending on the individual.

My ideal worker

- Someone who is committed and trustworthy.
- Someone who can give good advice.
- Someone fun and eccentric.
- Someone who is assertive as they have responsibility to look after and take care of you.
- Motivates young people to do well and be independent.
- Not patronising, as this happens a lot in regards to workers and young people.
- Someone who is organised and realistic about the extent of the support they can offer.
- Not false, someone who is genuine and intelligent.
- Someone who preferred their ideal worker to be the same race as them in order to connect with them easily without having to explain culture, whereas others wanted the opposite race as they felt that it would be too close to home having a worker of the same race.
- Is easy-going and open-minded.
- Some young people wanted a young worker, suggesting that this would make them feel more understood, whereas others felt that having a worker over 25 would be more appropriate as they feel that workers within this age group would be more experienced and therefore know how to resolve any issues.
- Has to listen to my needs and concerns.
- Treats the individual based on their personality rather than their age, which can come across as patronising.
- Someone who understands the way youths speak and their background.
The most commonly identified issues facing teenagers were:

1. Emotional problems
2. Poor family relationships
3. Self-harm
4. Problems with education

Parents said the support received from services was positive, timely and made a real difference:

- The worker helped me to cope with behavioural problems of my teenager
- I was supported in meetings with housing, school and other agencies
- I was listened to and was given advice on how to keep children safe
- I was provided with support at meetings
Support given to young people and families made a difference when there was:

- Flexibility in approach e.g., meeting with the young person at a location where they feel most comfortable
- A high and positive expectation of young people
- A non-judgmental attitude
- Recognition given to small achievements
- The opportunity for the young person to express their views
- Interventions tailored to the needs of the individual
- A solution-focused approach
- Good multi-agency working.

How can we empower families and help them to develop the resilience needed to sort out crises and prevent family breakdown themselves?

- Provide information about any services they may need
- Use social media platforms as a means of contacting services
- Early intervention training and support
- Offer support to parents, such as parenting groups, to encourage them to find solutions to their own problems
- Family Group Conferences

What are the most common issues teenagers are facing?

1. Emotional problems
2. Poor relationship with family
3. Problems with education
4. Parents unable to cope with behaviour
5. Child sexual exploitation

What could we do differently?

- More early intervention.
- Clear understanding of who can make decisions regarding the child’s safety.
- Ensure all external agencies have the same expectations for young people and families.
- Offer more targeted activities/sessions/courses for young people to engage in.
- Work more closely in partnership with foster carers.
- Give social workers less cases so they have more time to work with young people.
- Ensure a quick response time.
- Offer long-term as well as short-term support.
Iyesha (team co-leader)

Taking on the role as team leader this year was probably the most challenging aspect of the project but also very enjoyable.

My most enjoyable experience during this project was getting to know the people on my team. Everyone brought their own individual skills and personalities to the table which helped make this year’s project a success.

The project enabled me to gain a better insight into the services that Camden provides and the issues that many young people are facing, some of which I could relate to. I think my leadership skills have really developed during the project as well as my ability to stay organised and on top of things.

I feel more confident in my ability to lead a team successfully and stay engaged and focussed with tasks on a project.

Jenny (team co-leader)

During the project I learned what it was like to be a co-team leader.

I realised how different it can be to be one of the team leaders compared to being one of the team members. Being a team leader you need to steer people in the right direction and make sure they meet their goals while being part of the team.

The project taught me how Camden social services prioritises young people who really need help with the challenges they face and the different kind of support they offer for those young people.

I really enjoyed this project because it taught me valuable lessons. I had fun with my team and I enjoyed getting to know new people who really know how to come together when we need them most.
Evaluation of the inspection by Young Inspectors

**Rose** (young inspector)

I enjoyed all aspects of the project. I enjoyed working with my team members to put everything together and using all of our best ideas to form the final report.

I also enjoyed hosting and preparing the Children in Care Council event for professionals, young people and carers as I learned new skills and I was able to speak to new people and find out what they wanted to be improved within services.

I have gained a lot of knowledge about services in Camden that I did not know about before and now can possibly use for my own personal life.

This project has shown me that I can dedicate myself to improve the effectiveness of the services. It has also allowed me to see what professionals do on a day-to-day basis and this has inspired me to consider working for Camden services.

**Sophie** (young inspector)

I enjoyed every moment being part of the Young inspectors project. The project overall was very interesting and fascinated me as it was something I’ve never done before.

I really enjoyed holding the events, as it allowed us to focus on what was important.

During the Young Inspectors project there were a few challenges. However we were able to overcome them as a team. During the first week it was challenging for me to meet new people as I am a very shy person. Young Inspectors helped me build my confidence which will help me in the future.

I gained confidence to ask questions in meetings with professionals, which I would not have been able to do before. I have also been able to work with a group, whereas I used to always want to work alone. Working with a group helped me to realise how much fun and easier some things could be. I have also learned how to better socialise with other young people, which again improves my confidence.

The project has helped me to change my perception of myself and who I am as a person. I feel like I can believe in myself more by getting my thoughts and ideas out to other people.

Everything I’ve gained from Young Inspectors most definitely will be very useful, for example: college, job interviews and meeting new people.

**Sean** (young inspector)

The most enjoyable aspect of the young inspectors project was making the recommendations for stakeholders within Camden.

When creating the recommendations I felt that we were addressing the problems directly and improving the services that I am thankful for.

Before doing the Young Inspectors project, I had very little experience in working with a team to this level.

I realised the importance of being part of a team. At school I mainly work for myself but in this project other team members were relying on me to help get the job done.

This project has made me feel that I should constantly be challenging myself to improve my skills and has made me feel that I am capable of more than I think.
Key messages identified from consultation responses and from the research are:

**Supporting teenagers who display difficult behaviours can be challenging for staff, parents and families. Some of the key challenges identified by parents and staff include:**

- Professional and parental boundaries being pushed and tested by young people.
- Parents and staff feeling ineffective at times.
- Young people's difficulty in developing positive and trusting relationships with parents and staff.
- Being unable to sustain a positive change in behaviour.
- Finding the right balance between supporting the young person's needs and those of their parents.

### Key recommendations arising from this inspection included the need for:

1. **Availability of tailored support for individual's needs with a more informal approach.**
2. **Reduce the number of meetings as they can be overwhelming for young people.**
3. **Continue giving young people opportunity to participate with interventions and having opportunity to influence plans and decisions.**
4. **The right length of the support – as it is a crucial factor in ensuring the support given is effective.**
5. **Young people to have a choice of the age and gender of their worker as these have been identified as important factors by young people (more mature staff preferred).**
6. **Continued support for parents to help them sustain good parent – child relationship.**
7. **Support for parents to enable them to deal with conflict within the family through classes and parenting skills.**
8. **Support families in a way that develops their confidence and autonomy. Family partnership is a good model to promote resilience.**
9. **Information for young people and parents online with apps.**
10. **Well-trained partners in giving information and advice.**