

Gateshead Borough Council

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

And

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection date: **27 October 2015 to 19 November 2015**

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Children's services in Gateshead are good		
1. Children who need help and protection		Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires Improvement
3. Leadership, management and governance		Good

¹ Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

Executive summary

Children's services in Gateshead are good because leaders, managers and workers are highly effective. Very good practice was seen in the following areas: intensive family support in relation to domestic abuse; performance management and quality assurance arrangements; fostering support; celebrating the achievements of children looked after and care leavers and promoting children's rights.

There is strong corporate commitment to safeguarding and improving outcomes for all children and young people in the borough. Political leaders and elected members led by the chief executive officer (CEO) are good advocates for vulnerable children and young people. The Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning is a skilled and confident leader. He is effectively supported by the CEO, members and other directorates within the council, and a strong, cohesive senior management team. The council has responded effectively to the areas for development identified following the inspection of child protection services in 2013 and the inspection of safeguarding and looked-after children services in 2011. Improvements have been sustained in a methodical way.

Leaders and managers have a comprehensive understanding of local need. This is reflected in strategic planning with explicit objectives for improvement and service development. The council is responsive to the diverse needs of the community and delivers a wide range of accessible and appropriate services. Good-quality service provision is secured through effective prioritisation and a shared understanding of safeguarding across the multi-agency partnership.

The council has undertaken significant work with partners to ensure confidence and understanding of the threshold for access to children's social care. Advice, information and timely signposting ensures children, young people and families receive the right support at the right time. There is a clear and accessible early help offer. A particular strength is the alignment of adult and children's commissioning for example, services for parents which include domestic violence support and prevention, adult mental health and substance misuse services. This is leading to much earlier identification of children in need of help and protection.

There is a highly effective multi-agency approach to safeguarding and managing risk across the council and wider partnership. A particularly strong area is the response to children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing from home and care. Responses to child protection concerns are timely and robust. Social workers have manageable caseloads and are supported by effective supervision. This allows practitioners to complete good-quality assessments of risk and need in a thorough but timely way. Despite this, plans are not consistently outcome-focused and do not always ensure that interventions are targeted or enable progress to be monitored and measured.

Corporate parenting arrangements are good. As a result, outcomes for children looked after are often good and improving, for example decisive action has been taken to improve the educational attainment of children looked after. Performance is

now above national comparators across all the key stages. Placement stability is very good and the vast majority of children looked after live with foster carers. The majority of children benefit from timely plans to secure permanence. Decisions about permanence are most often made by the child's second review. The profile of the fostering resource and the projected needs of children and young people is very well understood. This informs recruitment activity and planning to maintain sufficient resources.

Children and young people are at the heart of practice in Gateshead. The children in care council 'One Voice' are highly valued and have a wide range of opportunities to make a positive contribution across all areas of service delivery. The achievements of children looked after and care leavers are valued and celebrated.

Adoption performance is good. Children are identified at an early stage when adoption is being considered as part of their plan for permanence and their parallel plans are effectively tracked to minimise delays. Recruitment practice is robust and the majority of assessments are completed within timescales. Good links exist with regional partners and agencies, which broadens the potential links for children. Children are well matched with adopters and effective ongoing support promotes stability, which adoptive families highly value.

Arrangements for keeping in touch with care leavers are effective. Care leavers have good access to a range of suitable accommodation and they are well supported to develop independent living skills. However, pathway plans are not used effectively as tools to promote care leavers' health, wellbeing and education. Not enough care leavers sustain their education, employment or training beyond the age of 19 and the council needs to be more ambitious and persistent for this vulnerable group.

Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are good with outstanding features and promote a robust culture of improvement through learning. Management information is used well to monitor actual performance and impact and encourage staff at all levels to contribute to improving outcomes for children and young people. The workforce is stable and staff feel well supported by visible, approachable and accessible managers. There is good investment in social work staff and partner agencies, with clear expectations for learning and continuous professional development to improve and inform social work practice.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates three children's homes. Two were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children was in February 2013. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in January 2011. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Other information about the local authority

- The strategic director of care, wellbeing and learning has been in post since October 2014.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since June 2014.

Children living in Gateshead

- Approximately 40,100 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Gateshead. This is 20% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 23.2% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - In primary schools is 17.6% (the national level is 15.6%)
 - In secondary schools is 14.1% (the national level is 13.94%)
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 5% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5 % in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are the White 'Other' (which includes a significant Jewish community as well as those from many European countries) and Asian/Asian British.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - In primary schools is 5.9% (the national average is 19.4%)
 - In secondary schools is 4.1% (the national average is 15%).

² The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

Child protection in Gateshead

- At 31 March 2015 1,590 children were identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,602 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31 October 2015, 238 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 258 at 31 March 2015.
- At 31 October 2015, one child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from two at 31 March 2015.
- Since the last inspection in 2013, five serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review has been completed.

Children looked after in Gateshead

- At 31 October 2015, 367 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 92 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 340 (85 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2015.

Of this number:

- 143 children (or 39%) live outside the local authority area
- 18 children live in residential homes, of whom 44% live out of the authority area
- nine children live in residential special schools
- 319 children live with foster families, of whom 36% live out of the authority area
- three children live with parents, all of whom live in the authority area
- one young person is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child.

In the last 12 months:

- there have been 25 adoptions
- 16 children became subject of special guardianship orders
- 198 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 25 returned to be looked after
- 26 children and young people who have ceased to be looked after have moved on to independent living
- Six young people who have ceased to be looked after are now living in houses of multiple occupancy.

Recommendations

1. Improve the quality of all children's plans, including pathway plans to ensure that targets for improvement are clear and that they focus on risk and the most important issues for children, young people and care leavers (paragraphs 17, 25, 46, 48 and 80).
2. Ensure that child protection conferences and looked after reviews are used to drive and progress plans through the use of effective challenge and robust risk analysis. (paragraphs 17, 36, 81 and 99)
3. Improve the attendance of education professionals at all children and young people's reviews and meetings to ensure a robust focus on their educational outcomes (paragraph 19).
4. Ensure that children who are subject to child protection processes have access to independent advocacy in order to help share their views and to inform decisions about their lives (paragraph 19).
5. Support care leavers to understand their health histories more thoroughly and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services (paragraphs 78, 79 and 95).
6. Devise a more effective way of communicating legal entitlements to all care leavers (paragraph 83).
7. Establish a protocol with all education and training partners to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide proactive support for care leavers to stay on their courses and complete their qualifications (paragraphs 81, 82 and 93).
8. Ensure the adoption panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel and adoption performance. (paragraphs 64 and 99)

Summary for children and young people

- Senior managers and councillors in Gateshead want to give children the best start in life. When children and their families need help, good-quality services and support are available at the right time.
- Social workers and managers are good at listening to children and making sure their views are acted on. When they do assessments to find out what children need, they always talk to people who know the family such as teachers, health professionals and sometimes police officers. This is to make sure they provide the right help and support to make children safe and to offer help to parents and carers.
- When social workers make plans to help children and their families, the plans do not always show what is going to happen and who is going to help.
- Social workers are very good at identifying when children are at risk of sexual exploitation. If children go missing, they will always be visited by a trustworthy adult when they return home to see how they can help to keep them safe in future. Senior managers make sure professionals from all agencies work together to protect children and young people.
- Children who are looked after go to live with very skilled carers who look after them well. Wherever possible they will live with their brothers and sisters. If it is safe to go home social workers make sure this happens at the right time and provide support for as long as necessary. When children need to be adopted, social workers find adoptive parents quickly.
- One Voice, which is the Children in Care Council, works hard to influence how children looked after are supported. Children can contribute to their reviews, make complaints, suggestions or comments on their achievements using the Mind of My Own app (MOMO).
- Councillors and senior managers want all children to do well at school. They provide lots of support to help children make progress in their learning. They celebrate children's success and are very proud of all children's achievements.
- When young people leave care, they get good support to find a safe place to live and to live independently. Care leavers get good help from their personal advisors and value these relationships. The council needs to get better at giving care leavers information about their health and what benefits they are entitled to. They also need to get better at helping care leavers stay in education, employment and training after their 19th birthday.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children who need help and protection are identified early and receive effective and timely interventions. Multi-agency partnerships are strong with a robust focus on safeguarding. Thresholds for access to social care are well understood and embedded. A wide range of very good targeted and coordinated early help is delivered by children’s centres, commissioned services and in-house provision with elements of outstanding practice within intensive family support. Good-quality early help assessments lead to effective family-focused interventions. Regular reviews take place via team around the family (TAF) arrangements. Very good performance management arrangements evidence these services are effective in providing support for families, reducing the need for social care intervention and sustaining progress when children’s cases step down from statutory services. This is reducing re-referrals to children’s social care.</p> <p>Referrals to children’s social care receive timely responses that are thoroughly considered, safely managed and lead to swift and decisive actions. In almost all cases, child protection enquiries are thorough and benefit from effective multi-agency strategy meetings. Whilst timely, child protection conferences and core groups are not always effective in challenging and driving children’s plans. Poor attendance by educational professionals at some key meetings means that information sharing is not as robust as it should be.</p> <p>Assessments are holistic, make good use of historical information and evaluate the child’s experience well. Most assessments balance strengths and risks and lead to appropriate outcomes for children. Evidence of direct work with children is a particular strength. Social workers know the children they work with well and, as a result, provide good support to meet children’s needs and promote their safety. Where children cannot express their views, social workers use observations to inform the assessment. Timely identification and provision of services where needed during assessments ensures children receive help at the point it is first recognised. Children’s plans however do not focus consistently on outcomes and contingencies, although case recording clearly evidences the progress children are making.</p> <p>Multi-agency arrangements to safeguard vulnerable children who go missing from home, care or education or are at risk of sexual exploitation are robust. Where required, children receive coordinated help and protection that are underpinned by effective risk assessments. Regular monitoring of their progress via the Missing, Sexual Exploitation and Trafficked Group (MSET) provides additional scrutiny and leads to effective support for children and young people, which then informs strategic prevention and disruption work.</p>	

Inspection findings

9. Gateshead has appropriately prioritised and invested in early help and prevention and this is making a positive difference in improving children's outcomes. The early help quality assurance system is providing a good overview of the effectiveness of early intervention within the Family Intervention Team (FIT), Positive Pathways, children's centres and Youth Support Team. Children and their families benefit from a wide range of targeted and well-coordinated services, both commissioned and in-house, when they first need help. As a result, some children's circumstances improve and others who need more targeted or specialist help are identified quickly.
10. A strong emphasis on partners delivering early help through collaboration and cooperation has resulted in consistent use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to identify and respond to need. The vast majority of CAFs seen were thorough and contained an assessment of risk that included the impact on the child. 'Team around the child' meetings and reviews are regular. They are managed effectively by a lead professional and well attended by a good range of agencies. Family engagement is clear throughout the process. In the vast majority of cases, the life of a child (and often the parent) has improved because of the services provided.
11. A Positive Pathways team ensures that early help services are delivered at the right level, coordinating children's cases as they are 'stepped up' and 'stepped down' between early help and children's social care. The Family Intervention team, children's centres and the adolescent youth support service offer targeted interventions to meet identified need. However, too many children with a disability experience statutory assessments that are not proportionate to their identified need when a lower level service response is required. The council needs to make pathways to early help services clearer for families and children with a disability. Overall, social workers, other professionals and parents spoken to during the inspection identified significant improvement in the outcomes for many children because of the good quality services they receive. Due to the success in phase one of the Families Gateshead (Troubled Families) programme, the council was an early adopter of phase two of the programme. There are 672 families currently receiving coordinated support, led by a wide range of agencies. The service is tracking a further 334 families where positive outcomes have been achieved to ensure that progress is maintained.
12. Information sharing between partner agencies is effective and appropriate. Experienced social workers and managers provide social work expertise at the point of contact with children's social care. Most social workers and managers have received recent training to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation female genital mutilation (FGM) and trafficking. No cases of FGM or trafficking are currently reported in Gateshead. A workshop to raise awareness of radicalisation has provided information for frontline staff, including the duties placed on all agencies and the role of frontline workers.

13. Where appropriate, consent for enquiries is explicitly recorded. Thresholds between early help and statutory child protection work operate effectively. Robust information gathering by duty workers at the contact and referral stage leads to timely and informed decision making in the vast majority of cases. Management oversight is robust and additional quality assurance of decisions by peer managers where cases have closed acts as an additional safeguard.
14. Strong links with early help services mean that children and families who do not meet the threshold for children's social care receive support, where appropriate. Re-referral rates have reduced from 20.1% in 2014–15 to 11.6% currently, indicating that the support provided to families is effective in meeting their needs. Good communication between the longstanding, dedicated emergency duty team and day-time services results in robust information sharing and effective support to children in the evenings and at weekends.
15. Assessment quality is good. They do, however, take longer to complete than nationally. In 2014–15, 53.1% of assessments took 41 to 45 days for completion and only 5.2% were within 10 days. The council has not yet analysed the underlying reason for this and therefore cannot be certain that all assessments are completed within the child's timescale. However, this does not lead to a delay in service. In the vast majority of cases seen by inspectors, children received services and had an interim plan while the assessment was ongoing.
16. Assessments effectively evaluate the child's experience and contain balanced strengths and risk analysis. Chronologies are present in almost all cases and previous history is well considered. In almost all cases, children are seen alone where appropriate and good attention is paid to obtaining their views and feelings, including sensitive direct work and observations of younger children. Assessments involving a child with a disability are holistic and consider every child within the family. A child's ethnicity and religion are given careful consideration and there is evidence that the council have improving relationships with diverse groups including a large Jewish community. However, there is further work to do to help community leaders understand social care thresholds and facilitate early engagement if there are concerns.
17. Assessments do not always lead to effective plans. Although no cases were seen where a child was without a plan, they did not consistently contain outcome-focused actions and timescales were not routinely included. Children's outcomes could be further improved if plans were more robust and specifically targeted to identified need. Core groups and care teams take place regularly. However, the lack of focused planning in some cases makes it difficult to measure progress against the plan. More positively, case recording does show that risk to children is reducing because of effective safeguarding activity. In most cases, contingency planning needs to be clearer, although parents spoken to were clear about what was expected of them and what would happen if things did not improve.

18. 11.5% of children subject to protection plans in Gateshead are unborn, which is well above the national average of 1.8% (2014–15). This proactive approach ensures that focused multi-agency work starts as soon as professionals identify concerns. Protective action commences and continues before and immediately after birth. As a result of this robust planning, 63% of children no longer required a child protection plan by the time they reached six months old.
19. Reviews of plans are timely, with 98.8% of initial child protection conferences (ICPC) and reviews taking place within the prescribed timescales. This is higher than the national average of 74.7%. Children are supported to attend their conference where appropriate. However, not all currently have access to independent advocates. A system has recently been introduced for family support workers to undertake direct work with children to seek their views where an ICPC is arranged. This is a new initiative and, while positive, does not replace robust independent advocacy. Good attendance at conferences by most agencies results in well-informed, multi-agency decision making. A concerted effort by the council has seen an improvement in the attendance of GPs at conferences, which is improving the availability of health information to inform risk analysis. The involvement of schools, however, is inconsistent with examples seen of non-attendance and reports not being provided.
20. Social workers and support staff in Gateshead know the children they work with well. Case records show that work influences assessments and reflects the child's day-to-day life experiences. With the exception of one safeguarding team, caseloads are appropriately weighted to social workers capacity and experience and management oversight is good. Inspectors did however request that senior managers review a small number of cases where plans for children were insufficiently robust. In all cases, inspectors' concerns were accepted and acted on immediately. Visits to children are regular and most children benefit from having a consistent social worker, which enables children and their families to develop trusting relationships with them. One parent told inspectors that their support worker 'helped to get the knots out of my stomach and make better life choices for me and my child'.
21. At the time of the inspection, there were 235 children subject to child protection plans at a rate of 58 per 10,000 at the end of March 2015. This is above the national average of 43 per 10,000 and represents a 7% decrease since the same period in 2014. A significant proportion of children are subject to protection plans due to neglect (67%). The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has undertaken an evaluation to look at reasons for this and plans to launch new guidance for frontline practitioners. There has been a delay in this guidance being introduced. However, in all but one case sampled by inspectors where neglect was the primary reason for a child protection plan, the child's needs were identified in a timely way and protective and authoritative actions had been taken where appropriate.
22. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) take place regularly and these effectively consider cases of children living in households where domestic

abuse is a significant risk. Information sharing between agencies enhances risk assessments and translates into individual safety planning for children and their families. The council has invested in domestic abuse support services including dedicated domestic abuse workers within the social work teams. Operation Encompass is a pilot initiative established with the police and two neighbouring authorities to share information with schools following domestic abuse incidents. This has led to 276 separate incidents of domestic abuse reported to schools that otherwise would not have been known. Although it is too early for an impact evaluation, the feedback from schools is positive as it allows them to consider additional support needs for pupils.

23. The prevalence of children who live in households affected by mental health, substance misuse or domestic abuse is well known. Robust assessments are undertaken by adult services and referrals generated to children's social care where appropriate, or families are signposted to early help services. The impact of adult substance misuse on the child features prominently in the assessments and plans seen by inspectors. Very good examples were seen of effective work with parents struggling with such problems, for example intensive family support and bespoke support packages for children and parents.
24. Children who go missing from home and school or who are at risk of child sexual exploitation benefit from a coordinated multi-agency response to assess risk and need. MSET sits monthly and collects information about children who go missing from home and care and those who experience or who are at risk of child sexual exploitation and/or child trafficking. Effective intelligence sharing in relation to potential hotspots, disruption activity and the use of harbouring notices are leading to a reduced risk for those children. Multi-agency mapping exercises support the process of building knowledge of local patterns, trends and 'push and pull' factors.
25. When children return from being missing and there is risk associated with being missing or it is a frequent occurrence, they are offered interviews through an independent provider or the youth service. The risk assessment tool is a live document and, in the vast majority of cases, the assessment is holistic and robust and leads to preventative actions and targeted support. Consultation takes place with strategic managers when concerns escalate and they offer additional oversight of the protection work. However, not all actions arising from assessments or from MSET translate into children's individual plans. The response to risk is often subsumed within existing plans, which sometimes makes it difficult to quickly extrapolate the concern and ensure a robust focus on the risk. Inspectors referred one case back to senior managers where risks to a child had not been recognised, resulting in immediate action being taken to reassess the risk under child protection procedures.
26. Preventative work in schools covers a wide range of risk-taking behaviours including: running away; child sexual exploitation; developing healthy relationships including same-sex relationships; internet safety; and drug and alcohol use. The council has thorough procedures for those children missing

from education, including undertaking all the necessary statutory checks and searches. Good links with the MSET and children's social care risk assessment processes ensure that risks to children who are missing from education are effectively analysed. Frontline police officers have had training to identify young women at risk and children's social care have begun to roll out training on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and trafficking to all staff. Currently 54 children are home educated. Good arrangements assist monitoring of the quality of the education and ensure that safeguarding is considered. Health professionals and children's social care undertake risk assessments of the small minority of families that are reluctant to engage with the service.

27. Work with homeless 16-to 17-year-old young people is compliant with legislation and guidance. No young people have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation since 2011. While the majority of accommodation provided is appropriate, inspectors visited one provision used in emergencies for young people and care leavers that was not suitable and requested the council reflect on its use. The homeless prevention service dedicated to young people, which is a joint venture by children's services and housing, provides a daily drop-in that gives young people and their families easy access to support and advice. Conciliation services between young people and their parents prevent breakdown in some cases. In all cases where a young person cannot remain at home, they receive a single assessment and, if they are 16 and still in statutory education, they become looked after.
28. The management of allegations against professionals who work with children is robust. The designated officer has taken targeted action to address under-reporting from agencies, including health services, through a wide range of awareness raising activities across the partnership including the voluntary sector. This is leading to an increase in referrals and a safer organisational culture is promoted through learning lessons at the conclusion of a case.
29. Private fostering arrangements are clear and follow statutory guidance. However, notifications for private fostering are low, with just one current arrangement and only three notifications in the past six months. Despite awareness-raising campaigns, the number has not increased. Agencies accept this is likely to be under-reported and, although a wide range of activity has been undertaken, further work is required to raise the profile of private fostering with the public and to raise awareness within faith and community groups.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

Summary

Services for children looked after in Gateshead are good. Decisions to look after children are generally timely, appropriate and in the best interests of the children. The sufficiency strategy is informed by a clear needs analysis and is continually reviewed to respond to changes within the children looked after population. The success of recruiting good-quality carers and careful matching is illustrated through very good placement stability. Foster carers are well supported.

Independent reviewing officers' (IROs) performance in respect of the timelines of the reviews of children looked after is very good at 99.4%. The Children's Rights Service is extremely effective in providing information, help and advice to children.

Assessments and reports are very comprehensive with good analysis of risks, evidence of research, consistent use of chronologies, and effective consideration of all relevant people in the children's lives. Social workers are good at listening to children and know them well. Conversely, the quality of care plans overall is not consistent and means that children's progress and outcomes, although good, could be further improved. The local authority are aware of the deficiencies in care planning and are actively addressing this matter.

Educational attainment in Gateshead is improving. Senior managers have taken robust action with education partners to drive improvements in personal education plans (PEPs). A successful raising education achievement for looked after children's team (REALAC) ensures that professionals focus on educational outcomes. Consequently, the rate of progress for current pupils is showing positive improvements, with 80% of the current cohort across all key stages making expected progress in line with their peers. Robust actions plans are in place for the remaining 20% of children.

Adoption performance is good. Children are identified at an early stage and their parallel plans are effectively tracked to minimise delays. Recruitment practice is robust. Children are well matched with adopters and effective ongoing support promotes stability. The adoption panel is suitably robust but is not routinely providing quality assurance feedback to contribute to monitoring and improving the service.

There are effective arrangements for keeping in touch with care leavers who also have good access to a range of suitable accommodation. However, not all services for care leavers are good. Pathway plans are not always meaningful or effective and not enough young people sustain their education, employment or training beyond the age of 19. Care leavers are not always aware of their health histories and a small number of care leavers with mental health difficulties are not getting sufficient

support in a timely way.

Inspection findings

30. In all cases seen, decisions for children to become looked after are timely, appropriate and in the best interests of the children. The Public Law Outline (PLO) is applied appropriately and ensures that children are supported and protected well. Effective intensive family support services wrap around families to keep children within their family where it is safe to do so. Social workers carry out viability assessments and use family group conferences to explore alternative options to being taken into care. This is resulting in effective use of placements with family members through Regulation 24 assessments and special guardianship orders.
31. The majority of children benefit from timely plans to secure permanence. Children are effectively tracked before their second review and from initial legal meetings to securing their permanence plan.
32. The timeliness of court proceedings for children's cases in Gateshead has increased from an average duration of 24 weeks in 2014–15 to 34 weeks for Quarter 1 2015–16 (period ending 30th June 2015). This is above the national average. These delays are not attributed to the quality of work and care applications by the local authority, which are considered by the judiciary to be good. They are the result of increased use of expert witnesses by parents and of difficulties in the courts timetabling children's cases. The Local Family Justice Board and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) have produced a clear action plan to address these matters.
33. Social workers are good at listening to children and know them well. Children's wishes and feelings are well recorded in assessments. Social workers form good relationships with children and there is some very good evidence of direct work with children to support them. Decisions and planning for children to return home are robust with clear evidence of senior management oversight and support plans in place to address risks. Children's wishes and feelings are at the centre of the planning for returning home.
34. In most instances (92.6%) social workers undertake statutory visits within timescales set by the council. Children are seen alone where appropriate and, importantly, the frequency of visits is increased where needed. The recording of visits is generally good but in a few instances the entries on the children's electronic recording system had insufficient detail. Life story work in the majority of children's cases sampled is good. In addition to the work of social workers, foster carers have worked well with children to complement this process.
35. Children who are looked after are very well supported to express their views. The children's rights officer is passionate and highly motivated about his work ensuring children and young people in care know their rights, are fairly treated

and their voices heard. A 'voice of the child' email address is used to collate children's views to influence service design and improvements. In September 2015, the MOMO (Mind of My Own) App was introduced. This enables young people to send their views to their IRO or social worker and comment on services or raise concerns. Children from One Voice stated that they know their rights and consider that since they first became children looked after, the services in Gateshead have improved.

36. IRO caseloads currently average 72 children, but some staff have caseloads in excess of 90 children. Caseloads are therefore outside the good practice guidance of 50-70 identified in the IRO handbook. This is hindering some aspects of their work, in particular their ability to monitor plans in between reviews. The timeliness of looked after reviews is very good at 99.4%. IROs endeavour to meet with children just before their reviews and the use of MOMO to gather the views of children for their reviews is working well. The app was only introduced in September 2015 and already 60 children looked after have signed up to use it.
37. Placement stability in Gateshead is very good. As at 31 March 2015, only 7% of children looked after had three or more placements in 12 months compared to 8% in 2013–14. The England average in the same period was 11%. At 31 October 2015 the figure for Gateshead children looked after is 5%. There has also been a marked improvement for the percentage of children looked after in the same placement for at least two years, rising from 74% in 2013–14 to 83% at 31 October 2015.
38. The vast majority of children are living in foster care 320 (86.7%), with 208 children (65%) living in the local authority area and 112 (35%) living in neighbouring local authorities. One third of Gateshead foster carers live out of the area but are approved and supported by the council. Children are well prepared to move to their permanent families and homes. Younger children are supported well through direct work to help them understand their plan and know about their family. Social workers take good account of children's wishes and feelings when considering where they should live and ensure that carers are given very good information before children go to live with them. Foster carers are skilled in moving children on to adoption.
39. The projected needs of children looked after is very well understood. This informs recruitment activity and planning to maintain sufficient resources. Initiatives to improve choices and meet the needs of identified groups of children, for example complex older children, are ongoing. Those children where a permanence plan of long term-fostering is decided are effectively tracked to identify long-term families to meet their needs.
40. The recruitment of foster carers is good. There is an effective and timely system for responding to enquiries to foster. Home visits are robust and clearly focus on safeguarding, motivation and potential to foster. Managers oversee decisions at each stage in the process and during assessments. Where workers

identify potential foster carers with supporting experience, there is a fast track route to progress timely assessments. Foster carers are well supported by experienced workers and receive effective supervision to ensure the quality of standards are maintained. The service is clear on the expectations for children and, where these fall short, decisive action is taken. Support groups are held frequently and are popular with foster carers. Groups enable foster carers to meet, build relationships and offer and receive support. The groups offer themed sessions facilitated by workers and partner agencies on areas such as advocacy, the law and fostering, equality and diversity and gathering evidence to prepare for supervision. The fostering team offer an excellent out-of-hours duty system for foster carers to support them in crisis.

41. Effective commissioning of external placements has resulted in some positive outcomes for children placed outside Gateshead. In particular, the quality of placements is very good with well-planned support for education and health needs, risk reduction and providing stability.
42. The sufficiency strategy is informed by a clear needs analysis and is regularly reviewed to respond to changes within the children looked after population. Placements for children with a disability and where children may have complex needs are carefully considered and bespoke packages of support or specialised placements are commissioned as appropriate for as long as required. The council is good at promoting placements with relatives and friends and has achieved improved placement stability through this as well as keeping children closer to home in Gateshead. The council is currently on target to recruit 30 foster carers for 2015–16.
43. Children are always placed in accommodation that is judged by Ofsted as good or better. There are five children in placements that are currently judged as requiring improvement. No children are living in placements judged inadequate. When services are not good, commissioners monitor the placement and, if necessary, a plan is developed for individual children to ensure that they are safe.
44. Supervised contact arrangements are good. Referrals are supported by robust assessments in order to match children to workers and venues. The service is overstretched at present but this is not causing undue delay. In the interim, social workers are supervising some of the contact visits over and above what they would normally undertake. It is a strength that children have continuity of worker and that transport for children is provided either by the worker or the foster carer. This means children's development, emotional attachments and security can be maintained. However, contact plans are not always clear about when social workers should observe contact and formal reviews of contact are not undertaken. This means that the impact of contact on children and the behaviour of parents is not robustly explored or understood.
45. Overall the quality of assessments seen is good. Assessments and reports, including reports for court, are comprehensive with good analysis of risks and

evidence of research. There is consistent use of chronologies and effective consideration of all relevant people in the children's lives, including wider family members. The needs of children are well considered with good attention to health matters and identity and diversity. When the needs of children change, the local authority routinely undertakes a single assessment to consider what further action is needed to support progress. This is very good practice.

46. The quality of care plans require improvement overall. Some good planning is undertaken with regard to court work, early permanence and when children return home. However, the quality of planning is not consistent and means that children's progress and outcomes, although good, could be further improved. The current care planning format focuses too much on the identified themes contained in the template instead of addressing children's needs according to risk and importance. Transition planning for children with a disability is appropriate. Adult services allocate a social worker at the young person's 17th birthday and time is taken to build relationships and rapport with the young person before transfer.
47. Gateshead Youth Offending Team (YOT) has become the only local authority team in the North East to attain the Restorative Justice Quality Mark. This award demonstrates that Gateshead YOT is delivering good-quality, safe and sustainable restorative services that meet six set standards. Restorative justice is offered to all victims in Gateshead. The YOT work effectively in trying not to criminalise children looked after. This approach has been successful with 98 children currently being considered through preventative work and 50 through statutory work, having received the minimum of a caution.
48. Children looked after in Gateshead who are missing and at risk of child sexual exploitation receive a well-coordinated response to the risks. The missing sexual exploitation and trafficked group (MSET) collects information about children who go missing from care and those who experience or who are at risk of child sexual exploitation. When children go missing frequently or there is a concern a return home interview is undertaken by an independent provider. Strong relationships with the police ensure rapid responses when concerns escalate. However, this information does not always translate into a bespoke missing or child sexual exploitation plan, but is included within the children looked after plan where these specific needs are not always prioritised.
49. The timeliness of children's annual health assessments has improved with 99% completed within the year. This is an increase from 96% in 2012–14. Performance information about initial health assessments is recorded on a monthly basis. The most recent monthly figure shows that only 52% of initial health assessments were completed within 28 days. This delay is attributable to additional consents being required by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, looked after children and young people's team (LACYPT) before they can undertake the initial health assessments. In 2014–15, 94.4% of dental checks were undertaken within 12 months of a child becoming looked after. This is better than 88.4% reported in 2013–14. There is a clear action plan in place to

improve performance on health and new guidance has been published and circulated to health professionals to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and continue to promote the health of children looked after.

50. The LACYP have good arrangements in place to consider the quality of their work. This includes seeking children's views from which an action plan is drawn up. The review of February 2015 noted that 96% of children felt that the health assessment experience was 'great or OK'.
51. A Care Quality Commission inspection in July 2014 identified some shortfalls in health performance and provision. These have been appropriately identified in action plans and are being addressed. Improvements can be seen in waiting times for children and young people's service (CYPS), previously known as child and adolescent mental health services. Children referred as urgent are seen within 48 hours and the average waiting time from referral to initial consultation is now 13.6 weeks, with evidence more recently of the last 14 children being seen within 10 weeks. These timescales are an improvement on previous performance but there is still no clear risk assessment criteria for referrals. The local authority is aware of these issues and is taking action with partners to achieve improvements.
52. Clear protocols, procedures and good access to early intervention and treatment services for substance misuse ensure that children in Gateshead receive appropriate responses. Services are aligned with adult provision, enabling effective support when children reach 18 years of age. In order to support children looked after, three drop-in sessions have been delivered in children's homes and there is a regular drop-in service at one of the children's homes.
53. The REALAC team is currently supporting 272 school-aged children, 31% of whom attend schools out of the borough. The team works effectively with schools and social workers in and out of the borough to raise attainment for children and young people. Progress is thoroughly tracked and monitored and those children at risk of falling behind or with increased barriers to learning are discussed on a weekly basis. Good monitoring by the REALAC team means that attendance for children looked after compares favourably with all pupils, at 94.4% compared to 95.6% for all pupils.
54. Despite the majority of schools in Gateshead being good or better, 19% of children looked after attend schools that are less than good. Wherever possible when children enter the care system and need to change schools, every effort is made to place them in a good school. Where children are in a school that are less than good, their progress is closely monitored and supported by the virtual school.
55. Attainment for children looked after is improving, and is above national comparators across all the key stages. Over time, the gap between children looked after and other children in Gateshead have been closing but is not yet

consistently across all stages. For example at Key Stage 1, improvements have been made across all main subjects resulting in reading, writing and mathematics being in line with or just below all Gateshead pupils in 2015. However, at Key Stage 2, Gateshead is performing below comparators in writing, grammar and reading and significantly below in mathematics.

56. Results for the 2014 Key Stage 4 cohort of children looked after were disappointing, particularly for A*-C including English and mathematics, which declined from 35% to just 9%. The local authority recognised the need to act on this poor performance and put a range of measures in place, for example additional one-to-one tuition for English and mathematics and coaching for exams. These are having an impact and rates for the cohort have improved to 20% for 2015. The rate of progress for current pupils is showing positive improvements and 80% of the current cohort across all key stages are making expected progress in line with their peers.
57. Children and young people in care in Gateshead are represented through the One Voice youth network, which is highly influential in shaping services for children looked after. There are strong links with the local authority scrutiny committee and corporate parents. Despite a recent change in representatives in One Voice, the work has continued and very good progress has been achieved on changing how children in care are supported, how services are provided and in providing a social networking forum for the children and young people. Achievements include the introduction of MOMO in September 2015. The young people really appreciate this in preference to the written documents that they used to complete. In addition, One Voice has devised a new one-page care plan format to simplify the planning documents for them. IRO business cards, the Care Pledge and fostering guides have also been introduced, following suggestions by the children and young people involved.
58. The council works hard to ensure that children have access to social, educational and recreational opportunities. Social events are part of the One Voice youth network. One Voice also has good links with neighbouring and national children in care councils. Some young people recently attended a residential event in the Lake District to develop a regional care leaver event that is to be held in North Tyneside in Spring 2016. The event will focus on ensuring that care leavers are fully aware of their entitlements.
59. Foster carers are provided with a 'Max Card', entitling the children they care for to reductions in entry costs to local attractions not run by council and a 'Go' card for access to leisure facilities run by the council. These are appreciated by the foster carers and children. Unfortunately, there are no reciprocal arrangements with other authorities for those children in foster care outside Gateshead. Staff from the REALAC team carefully monitor the use of the pupil premium, which is being applied well to support the individual progress of pupils in different ways including one-to-one support, providing equipment such as laptops, and enabling children looked after to fully participate in all out-of-school activities.

60. The council are very good at recognising the achievements of children looked after and care leavers. A recent celebration event was attended by approximately 150 children and care leavers. It was a wonderful, professionally managed and organised event. There were a number of care leavers in attendance who performed and received awards in recognition of their achievements. The event was very well attended by social workers, family members, carers and council members.

Adoption performance is good

61. Children are identified at an early stage when adoption is being considered as part of their plan for permanence. Children's progress through care proceedings and planning is effectively tracked to avoid unnecessary delay. An 'early alert' system ensures the adoption team is fully informed of children who may potentially progress to adoption. This enables the adoption team to consider the adopters already approved and those who may be currently in assessment as potential options for children.
62. There is a coherent recruitment strategy for adopters based on an analysis of the likely predicted numbers, needs and profiles of children. Marketing activities are effective and interest and enquiries have increased. Adopters report very positively on their initial contact with the service and the quality of information and welcome they receive. Prospective adopters are well informed about adoption through information evenings and the pre-approval training prepares them well. The majority of assessments are timely, robust and child centred with clear analysis supporting the recommendations. Where a few delays occur, there are viable reasons that are recorded and these delays are not due to the lack of urgency by the service. Assessments are currently underway with nine prospective adoptive families.
63. Family finding is purposeful with a dedicated worker pursuing options and links for children through a range of contacts, the national adoption register and regional information sharing. There are eight children currently waiting and there is active progress in pursuing options and potential links for all of them. There are currently six adopters waiting, some with specific age ranges or matching considerations. There is effective use of, and prompt referrals made to, the National Adoption Register to initiate nationwide family finding. In the last 12 months, seven children and eight adopters have been referred for national finding family. In 2014–15, the majority of children (16 out of 22) were matched successfully locally and within the wider region. There are currently 16 children placed with adopters with applications for adoption orders under review or in progress.
64. The adoption panel is suitably robust and carefully considers recommendations for approvals and the quality of matching children with adopters. The agency

decision maker makes timely decisions and, where required, pursues additional information to inform well-considered decisions for children. The chair of the panel and the agency decision maker meet periodically but the panel is not routinely providing analytical quality assurance feedback to contribute to monitoring and improving the service. This is a requirement.

65. Children are well matched with suitable adopters. Where it is in the interests of children, further time is taken to find the right family. There are no undue delays. For a small number of children (six) where extensive national searches have not found potential adopters, action has been taken to secure permanence through long-term fostering, in three cases with their existing foster carers. The service has a good record for placing older children and for placing brothers and sisters together. In 2014–15, separate placements were found for six groups of siblings, enabling them to live together in line with their assessments and plans.
66. There are minimal disruptions, with one breakdown in 2014–15. This demonstrates the quality of matches for children and the post-adoption support available. The potential lessons from a review of the disrupted placement have been reflected on by the service and the panel.
67. Fostering to adopt is a relatively new initiative that is successfully achieving permanence through adoption for children. Four families have been specifically approved to foster children at the point they became looked after with the plans to become their adopters, should adoption become the final care plan. In three of the four families, children are now adopted. One fostering-to-adopt couple spoke positively of how they were able to care for a new-born baby through early medical treatments in hospital. The baby had the opportunity to form early attachments from birth. For one child, plans are not at the stage to determine whether permanence through adoption is the outcome and this remains a foster placement. There are currently two families in the assessment process expressing an interest in fostering to adopt . This is a very positive start and the service is actively promoting this initiative as part of the options for adoption in all recruitment activity.
68. Arrangements to support children and adopters pre and post adoption are effective and responsive. Timely assessments are completed to identify individual needs and tailor support packages. Adopters are well informed of their entitlements and the availability of the adoption support fund. Adopters spoken with valued the support they receive and the difference it made to their confidence, relationships with children, understanding of attachment patterns and the improved stability in the family. In the last 12 months the service supported 31 families. A further 57 families are receiving assessed financial support.
69. Adoption support is commissioned through an adoption agency that offers a range of individual and group support options for children and adopters. This agency is currently providing support for 20 individuals. The agency provides

specific training to support adopters' understanding of and parenting responses to children's attachment needs. This is particularly highly regarded by adopters. Individual therapy and psychological support has been effective in helping families to improve relationships and attachments between child and adopter. The success of adoption support is demonstrated by the extremely low disruption rate. One adoptive parent described the impact for their child and family after receiving 'excellent' specialised behaviour management training, adding that without the support from the service the adoptive parent doubted if the family would still be together. It is significant that this family have recently adopted a second child; such is their confidence in the support from the service.

70. The local authority managers are fully aware that they face challenges to meet nationally agreed thresholds and extensively analyse their adoption performance to understand and predict the picture.
71. For the 26 children adopted in the 12 months before this inspection, the average time in days between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family was 531 days, which is 44 days above the national threshold for the period 2012–15 of 487 days. Of the 26 children, 11 were placed within the national threshold of 487 days.
72. Current yet unpublished figures for those placed for adoption this year suggest an improving picture, with 10 children placed within an average of 474 days and six out of 10 children placed within an adoptive family within the target 487 days.
73. The timeliness from placement order to matching is 141 days on average. This is 20 days more than the agreed national threshold of 121 days. Of 11 children placed but not yet adopted, six were matched within the target 121 days. The timeliness for those children placed in 2015 looks more positive but previous figures will continue to impact on meeting overall performance indicators.
74. Scrutiny of the children where there have been delays shows this is not due to a lack of purposeful planning. Overall timeliness is influenced by six children's plans that changed from adoption to long-term foster care, following extensive national searches for adoptive families. The figures are also influenced by three children adopted by their current long-term foster carers. These are very positive outcomes for the children who have continued to experience long-term stability and consistent parenting. For some children, matching took longer but has resulted in very good matches with adopters who are able to meet the children's specific needs in the longer term.
75. Overall, the numbers of children adopted has increased significantly since 2012–13, rising from 17 children to 33 children in 2013–14 with this figure stabilising at 34 children in 2014–15. The vast majority of children requiring adoption are white British, which is reflective of the local population.

The experience and progress of care leavers requires improvement

76. Arrangements for keeping in touch with care leavers are effective. Gateshead are in touch with 140 of 145 care leavers. Personal advisers are proactive in staying in touch, making regular telephone calls, sending texts, emails and unannounced visits. Personal advisers use birthdays as an additional incentive for young people to get in touch by providing a £50 birthday payment. At present one young person, an unaccompanied asylum seeker has been missing from the service since March 2013. All necessary safeguarding procedures have been followed in an attempt to locate the young person. This includes holding a number of strategy meetings, widespread investigation and searches by police and contact with the Border Agency.
77. Assessment of risk is key to the work undertaken by social workers, personal advisers and other support staff working with care leavers. They are effectively supported and challenged to identify risk and also to do something themselves about reducing their involvement in risky behaviour and to understand the consequence if they continue. Support is carefully calibrated to meet the specific needs of care leavers over time and to deal with the scale of the issues they may confront. This includes information and advice about the risks of sexual exploitation, substance and alcohol misuse, sexual health and safe relationships. When necessary, personal advisers skilfully coordinate input from other agencies and professionals to prevent the risky behaviours of a small minority of care leavers before they escalate out of control. Care leavers have also been involved in developing a care leavers' charter. The young people value the relationships they have with their personal advisers and the support they receive. As one young person put it, 'I see them as family; they are always there for me'.
78. Personal advisers report that all care leavers have access to their health histories, although wider access to health interventions and support is more variable. For example, GPs offer telephone assessments to access talking therapies but there is a delay in offering treatment. As a result, young people do not always take up the offer even when it is clear they would benefit from the service.
79. Not all young people are registered with a dentist, although the vast majority are registered with a GP. Delays remain in care leavers accessing mental health services. Young people spoken to were not sure if they had been given their health histories, but some thought they had been. Most were very clear about taking responsibility for their own health issues. One young person had been able to access counselling with the support of a personal adviser.

80. Pathway plans are not effective as planning tools. The majority are too descriptive and lack focus on the outcomes to be achieved. Line managers are not sufficiently monitoring the quality of pathway plans or providing senior managers with the information they need to inform the strategic action required to achieve positive outcomes for care leavers. All young people spoken to during the inspection were not clear if they had completed pathway plans and therefore were unable to comment whether or not they had found them helpful.
81. Despite the council comparing well in 2013–14 in relation to the numbers of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in education, training and employment at 57%, which is higher than the national average of 45%, education outcomes and employment opportunities for care leavers remain too variable. In 18 sampled and tracked pathway plans seen by inspectors, only seven (39%) care leavers aged 18-21 were in education, training or employment at the time of inspection.
82. The council has been slow to offer care leavers apprenticeships within its own departments. Very recently approval has been given to reprioritise apprenticeship places for care leavers. Despite the authority's learning and skills service having a wide apprenticeship offer across the whole region with local employers, offering 400 apprenticeships, the service only knew of two care leavers who have successfully completed an apprenticeship programme. At present, seven care leavers are being well supported to attend local universities, including help with fees and maintenance costs and additional payments to foster carers providing 'staying put' arrangements.
83. Care leavers are uncertain about their entitlements and none spoken to by inspectors had received written confirmation about what these were. However, it was clear from discussion that they received their entitlements, for example financial support to attend higher education. For the very small number of care leavers who have disabilities, thorough and well-managed transition arrangements ensure they continue to be effectively supported by adult services. Particularly good attention is paid to their ongoing education and training needs.
84. The council are compliant with the Southwark Judgement, ensuring that all 16- to 17-year-olds who become homeless are assessed as a child in need and, where appropriate, become looked after. All young people and care leavers now live in safe and secure accommodation. Three care leavers are in custody. No young people are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. The council last used this type of provision in 2011.
85. Care leavers have good access to a range of suitable accommodation, including increasing numbers who are benefitting from the staying put policy now in place. There are 15 care leavers supported under these arrangements. Taster flats are managed in partnership with the Council's Housing Services. Care

leavers use these properties to develop their independent living skills before being granted a tenancy of their own.

86. A commissioned service was developed in conjunction with Adults and Children's Services in response to an identified need for supported accommodation for young people in Gateshead. The project was a result of a bid for funding to 'Changing Places' and it was successful due to its innovative use of sport to engage and develop young people. This project currently provides five supported living placements for 16-17 year olds and an additional 15 placements for young adults aged 18 and over, including care leavers.
87. Successful joint working arrangements with housing staff ensures that young people at risk of losing their tenancies or becoming homeless are quickly identified through a RAG rating system. This proactive and more strategic approach is having a positive impact on increasing the numbers of care leavers successfully taking up and sustaining their own tenancies. A working group has been established between children's and housing services to plan for and support care leavers moving into Gateshead Council tenancies. The group wrap care and support around the young people to maximise the chances of successful transition providing young person's 'floating' support.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Leadership, management and governance is good. In particular: the engagement and participation of children, young people and families; workforce development; commissioning of services for children and families. Performance management and monitoring is good with outstanding features. This is contributing to the provision of good quality sustainable services and positive outcomes for the majority of children and young people in Gateshead.</p> <p>Children and young people are at the heart of good practice in Gateshead. Political leaders and members led by the CEO are good advocates for vulnerable children and young people. The Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning is a skilled and confident leader. He is effectively supported by other directorates within the council and a strong, cohesive senior management team. The council has systematically addressed the poor practice identified in 2011 by Ofsted and more recently areas for development in relation to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection findings of 2014. Good-quality service provision is secured and sustained through effective prioritisation and a shared understanding of the vision that Gateshead and its partners have for children, young people and families. Governance is strong and solid foundations are in place for taking services forward.</p> <p>Much work has been undertaken with partners to ensure confidence in applying the threshold to children’s services, which is now firmly embedded. Leaders use change management well and have effectively consulted with staff and partners for the planned transformation of services for children and families. Successful, effective practice is being used appropriately to identify how children’s, adult and health services will be aligned under one directorate from April 2016 and improve efficiencies and effective working arrangements.</p> <p>There is particular strength in the alignment of adult and children’s commissioning, for example in relation to service provision for parents including domestic violence, adult mental health, and substance misuse. Management oversight is good. The quality assurance framework is very comprehensive and well informed by outstanding performance management arrangements.</p> <p>While many services for care leavers have improved, the strategic oversight and monitoring of educational outcomes for care leaver’s needs to strengthen. There is more to do to ensure that care leavers receive consistently good-quality services.</p>	

Inspection findings

88. Children and young people are at the heart of good practice in Gateshead. The Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning (DCS) has approached challenges and the plans for transformation in a sustained, measured and systematic way. His encouraging manner is ensuring that services for children and their families are sustained. There is a strong ethos of collective responsibility across the council, which is helping to achieve the best outcomes for children. The director is effectively supported and challenged by the CEO, elected members, other directorates within the council, and a strong, cohesive senior management team.
89. The statement of assurance in relation to the director meeting statutory responsibilities for both children's and adult's services is coherent. Although its review is slightly delayed, there is a clear understanding of statutory responsibilities to ensure effective oversight and delivery of services for children.
90. Elected members take corporate parenting very seriously. The lead member for children's services is well inducted and supported to meet the responsibilities of the role and has shown effective challenge, for example, in relation to CYPS waiting times, appropriate payment for foster carers and enabling young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18. She has helped raise awareness about child sexual exploitation through her work with the parent's forum and this is good practice. The lead member does not attend children in care council meetings routinely or regional meetings with other lead members. This reduces opportunities for further improving service quality and sharing good practice.
91. The chair of scrutiny is an experienced social worker and this adds value to the level of challenge by elected members, which is robust and very impactful. Areas of strength and improvement are well understood and this leads to effective and timely challenge of key issues. Examples include educational attainment for children looked after, which is now improving; and children's health, which has led to a review of emotional health and wellbeing provision. There is comprehensive understanding and support for workforce development and regular meetings with frontline staff, children and young people.
92. Governance arrangements are robust and there is a golden thread running through all of the strategic plans for children, young people and families, both within children's social care and across the partnership. This is underpinned by an outstanding performance management and outcomes framework that is contributing to a shared ambition for and prioritisation of services for children and families. This includes a good focus on children and young people in the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership.

There are effective arrangements with Gateshead Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).

93. The broad membership of the corporate parenting forum, including the Fostering Association chair, representatives from housing, and the voluntary and community sector, is ensuring that children looked after are prioritised across the borough. Current challenges facing care leavers are understood. However, the strategic drive seen in relation to improving education outcomes for children looked after has not been as robust in ensuring that education, employment and training opportunities are secured and maintained for all care leavers.
94. The joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) is comprehensive and informs service needs well. The JSNA has a particular focus on vulnerable groups; including children looked after and care leavers, through a well-informed and appropriately aligned sufficiency strategy. There are clear pathways established for accessing a comprehensive range of services to support children and families in need of early help, targeted and specialist support. Services are robustly monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness. This includes, for example, joint commissioning with health in providing good-quality short break services for children with complex health needs.
95. There is particular strength in the alignment of adult and children's commissioning, for example in relation to service provision for parents in domestic violence, adult mental health, and substance misuse. Because prevalence is very well understood, children are receiving good levels of support in relation to substance and alcohol misuse. The pathway for care leavers requiring mental health support is less clear and some care leavers are not receiving the support they need in a timely way.
96. The contract for supporting children's emotional health and wellbeing, currently delivered by the children and young people's service, is under review in order to improve the timeliness and quality of provision for children and young people. There is evidence that waiting times are improved following appropriate challenge by senior leaders.
97. The anti-bullying strategy for the Gateshead strategic partnership has recently been distributed for consultation. The strategy aims to align partners together to tackle all areas of bullying and harassment. The fostering service bullying policy and procedure and the children's guide all have clear and easy-to-follow guidance.
98. The sufficiency duty is well met in relation to providing good value for money. There is effective monitoring of contract compliance by the children's commissioning team through, for example, membership of regional consortiums for children's homes, independent fostering agencies and provider forums. This is ensuring good quality and choice of accommodation for children looked after and care leavers, which are promoting very good placement stability.

99. Performance management and monitoring arrangements are good and have outstanding features and is facilitating robust challenge from elected members, leaders and managers in order to improve the quality of services for children. Managers readily access a SharePoint site for live performance information that effectively supports them in their task of driving service improvement. This has led to, for example, robust action being taken to prioritise dips in performance such as educational attainment and health provision for children looked after. There is an appropriate focus on improving consistency in quality across the service. However, evaluation of the challenges by IROs is not formally undertaken and an annual adoption panel report 2014–15 is not available. As a result, these areas of provision are not contributing as effectively as they could to driving service improvement.
100. A coherent and comprehensive quality assurance framework is embedded and supports a rigorous programme of management oversight and continuous improvement within the local authority. Routine auditing is strong with good attention to the consistency of the work and effective consideration of both qualitative and quantitative standards. Outcomes from audits are monitored and actions and improvement in practice reviewed at monthly performance clinics. Through this process, senior managers have identified children's plans are not effective tools for improving children's outcomes and are in the process of redeveloping the care planning template and rolling out targeted training for social workers and managers.
101. A quality assurance system is also embedded in relation to early help. This is providing a good overview of the effectiveness of early intervention within the family intervention team, Positive Pathways, children's centres and youth support. A quarterly health check is undertaken around a scorecard of workforce, quality performance and resources, demonstrating an established connection between performance and quality. The council is aware of the need to accelerate its focus on care leavers now that the protection of children is assured. The council has already sought to challenge, for example, the pause in provision of apprenticeships for care leavers.
102. There is good investment in and engagement with social work staff and partners to promote continual professional development and inspectors saw many examples of highly effective social work. The workforce strategy appropriately includes clear expectations for learning and continuous professional development to improve and inform workers practice. The principal social worker is well established and has a positive impact on improving quality and the recruitment and retention of social workers through implementing an attractive workforce offer and clear career pathways. Newly qualified social workers are effectively supported in their post-qualifying year. There are clear career pathways for managers and practitioners through 'first line', a regional pre-pilot programme for managers and 'front line', the FastTrack programme for student social workers. There are effective links with local universities to support student social workers and a 'step up to social work' programme enhances recruitment opportunities and service learning.

103. There is a responsive, accessible and appropriately targeted offer of training for social workers and managers. Examples include regular briefings, e-learning courses, subscription to social work publications as well as group training courses. There is good learning from serious case reviews regionally and nationally. Training is well informed by feedback and service needs. There is effective use of partnerships through the Public Service Academy, which delivers broader training opportunities to the workforce. However, learning from the neglect review undertaken by LSCB is not yet implemented.
104. Historically, Gateshead has had a stable workforce and the increase in the recent turnover of staff is well understood, with responsive action being taken to ensure competitive remuneration packages and securing the stability of the workforce in the longer term. The number of vacancies across the social care workforce is low. Existing staff are supported in maintaining appropriate caseloads with a stable group of agency staff to cover any vacancies and absence. Caseloads for IROs and conference chairs are slightly higher than recommended and this is hindering aspects of their work in relation to evaluating quality of practice.
105. There is effective sharing of good practice and collaborative working regionally, for example through conferences, effective work with the LFJB to reduce court timescales, and in work undertaken with universities to provide developmental opportunities for student social workers, qualified social workers and managers. Good practice is shared and adopted by other authorities, for example in relation to the development of a combined Special Guardianship and Regulation 24 assessment to promote efficiency in securing permanency during the assessment of potential permanent carers.
106. Supervision is of a consistently good quality and management oversight of cases is routine and comprehensive in most cases seen. There is a consistent focus on continual professional development through supervision, observations of practice and through appraisal. There is helpful guidance to providing good-quality supervision. Performance management and learning from training are routinely reviewed. There is a strong focus on compliance through supervision, but there are consistent elements of reflective practice and a focus on quality, particularly through appraisal and observed practice. Permanence for children and driving children's plans are a consistent focus of supervision. This includes supervision of IROs and child protection chairs, where the level of challenge is reviewed.
107. The children's rights service provides effective services for and coordination of complaints, advocacy and the provision of independent visitors for children, young people and their families. Services to promote children's participation are accessible, through imaginative use of technology like the MOMO app and a variety of tools to positively engage children and young people. There are many excellent examples of operational staff going the extra mile to ensure that children and young people are helped to understand interventions and contribute to planning. Two workers based in the referral and assessment team

are ensuring that all children over the age of ten can contribute to initial child protection conferences. In addition, regular meetings are held with advocates to ensure that children receiving short break services stay with other children and young people with similar interests and abilities.

108. There are cohesive working relationships between the corporate complaints team and children's rights service, which help children express their views well both formally and informally when they are not happy about a service. A strong corporate parenting responsibility was seen operationally and this is role-modelled effectively by the children's rights worker. High numbers of children make a positive contribution across all areas of service delivery and this was consistently seen through direct work.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board requires improvement

Executive summary

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) in Gateshead requires improvement to be good. While it fulfils its statutory responsibilities and there is clear strong commitment from key statutory agencies, there are gaps in its membership, activities and monitoring of frontline practice that limit its effectiveness. However, much of the work it undertakes it does well and some, very well.

The LSCB has not yet forged strong enough partnerships with the Health and Wellbeing Board to enable it to assert its influence. Membership of the LSCB is not sufficiently representative of the whole community. It does not currently have a lay member and, although it is actively exploring ways of promoting young peoples' and faith groups' involvement, plans are at an early stage. The annual report is too descriptive and not easily accessible to the lay reader. It does not report on private fostering arrangements. This is a missed opportunity to raise awareness.

The LSCB's analysis of the training it provides is not sufficiently robust for it to be assured that training is sufficient to meet local need or to measure its effectiveness in improving frontline practice. The multi-agency data set used by the LSCB does not assist scrutiny of the full range of issues that influence frontline practice. A lack of evaluative commentary or reporting by some agencies limits its usefulness further.

The LSCB exerts its challenge function appropriately, with some examples of strong challenge to partners resulting in improved engagement with safeguarding. However, it does not currently keep a challenge log. The LSCB has not developed a performance framework for measuring its own effectiveness. Nonetheless, the LSCB identified most of the areas for development seen in this inspection in March 2015 and is taking action to address them.

The LSCB scrutinises agencies' compliance with safeguarding policies and procedures through annual section 11 audits. The LSCB has recognised the quality of audits is too variable. For example, arrangements in individual schools under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 are not included. The LSCB has taken authoritative action to strengthen arrangements for next year and has introduced a peer review process to further assure the effectiveness of policies and procedures on the ground.

Good collaborative working between sub-groups has resulted in an effective whole systems approach to safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation and extremism. The board's auditing activity is used to improve practice. For example, the Neglect Inquiry has led to the development of comprehensive guidance for all agencies.

Recommendations

109. Ensure that the LSCB engages more effectively with the community it serves, including learning from the participation and testimony of children and young people, increased engagement with faith and ethnic minority groups, and timely recruitment of lay members (paragraphs 118 and 133).
110. Develop appropriate pathways to increase the LSCB contribution to and influence on the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure the experience of children and young people are given appropriate consideration in all activity (paragraph 121).
111. Ensure that training is sufficient to meet demand and is informed by a training needs analysis that includes analysis of impact on practice over time and the difference it has made to outcomes for children (paragraph 125).
112. Ensure that agencies report the outcomes of single-agency auditing activity to the LSCB to increase its oversight of practice (paragraph 127).
113. Review the multi-agency data set used by the board to ensure that it meets LSCB priorities and includes all relevant activity that impacts on frontline practice, including workforce information (paragraph 128).
114. Develop robust mechanisms for measuring the LSCB's effectiveness as part of a performance management framework (paragraph 129).
115. Ensure that the LSCB annual report provides a clear account of the activity of the LSCB and its strengths and areas for improvement that is easily understood by a lay reader (paragraph 137).

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

116. The LSCB complies with its statutory responsibilities as defined in 'Working together 2015'. The LSCB is appropriately constituted although it has had no lay member since June 2015. This recruitment has been purposely delayed due to a plan to recruit jointly with the Adult Safeguarding Board as part of a general strategy to align the work of the boards in a whole-life approach to safeguarding. While the LSCB anticipates that this will bring clear benefits in ensuring continuity, it means it has not benefited from a regular lay member perspective for some considerable time. The representation of the voice of young people on the LSCB is insufficient and, consequently, learning from their experience and their direct influence on board priorities is diluted. The LSCB had already recognised this gap before this inspection and is exploring ways of

strengthening young people's input. A report on the voice of the child is being collated, creation of a youth LSCB is under consideration and the chair has recently met with the Children in Care Council 'One Voice' to explore how the experience of children looked after can be represented.

117. The LSCB meets regularly and, while commitment to furthering the work of the LSCB by key statutory partners is strong, attendance logs show a high degree of variability in LSCB members' attendance at meetings. This includes key decision makers in statutory partner agencies. Although they have ensured representatives from their agencies attend regularly and relevant issues are fed back promptly, attendees are not always at the required level of seniority to commit to proposed actions. This leads to increased activity outside LSCB meetings and potential delay. The independent chair has put forward proposals to reshape the LSCB. While the chair anticipates this will facilitate attendance and increase the LSCB's efficiency, plans remain at an early stage.
118. The LSCB has a comprehensive and robust business plan covering a three-year period. Yearly action plans build on progress from the previous year. Plans are well aligned to other strategic plans such as the Children's Trust and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) as part of an overarching shared strategic vision. They are well informed by identified local needs, shared priorities and findings from local LSCB auditing activity as well as national learning. For example, the action plan for 2015/16 appropriately includes implementation of new neglect guidance based on learning from the Neglect Inquiry and a review of the multi-agency threshold document. This will ensure it contains specific guidance in relation to early identification of potential risk of child sexual exploitation, extremism and cyber-crime. However, the plan is too recent for it to have had a discernible impact in improving the functioning or effectiveness of the LSCB. This shared vision has not yet been realised into fully 'joined up' activity. Although links with the Children's Trust are strong, the LSCB has appropriately identified that its influence on the HWB requires strengthening. The HWB's governance arrangements do not include sufficient opportunity for the LSCB to exert its influence. This reduces the HWB's ability to test if it is robustly fulfilling its responsibilities to help protect and care for young people. The LSCB chair only attends the HWB annually and there is no current LSCB representation on the HWB. This limits the effectiveness of both boards. For example, a homeless health needs audit presented to the HWB in June 2015 did not report on the health needs of homeless 16 and 17 year olds or include any specific focus on care leavers. This was a missed opportunity.
119. LSCB members express confidence in the independent chair, who is highly skilled and knowledgeable across all areas of the business. He is supported by an experienced business manager who is pivotal to the smooth functioning of the LSCB. While all partner agencies confirm a mutual culture of robust challenge and debate and could give examples of effective challenge, the LSCB does not currently hold a challenge log. This means there is no clear audit trail for issues raised across the partnerships or systematic analysis of progress or

themes. The LSCB has recognised this gap and proposals to introduce a challenge log were agreed by the LSCB before this inspection.

120. The LSCB currently operates seven sub-groups that are appropriately aligned to the LSCB's key statutory responsibilities and priorities. Police, health and children's social care are well represented on the subgroups and the LSCB business planning group. They play a strong role in scrutiny arrangements and in updating the LSCB on developments in their respective agencies, including highlighting potential areas of concern. Schools' contribution has been far more variable but has improved in recent months. All sub-group chairs report to the LSCB at least bi-annually. They are members of the LSCB business group and this is supported by the LSCB business manager's membership of all sub-groups and chairing of two. As a result, communication across the groups is generally effective, leading to well-coordinated activities based on an established cycle of scrutiny, learning training and action.
121. The LSCB offers a comprehensive range of training courses with 52 training events held in 2014/15. Training is regularly updated to inform staff of changes in legislation and to share national and local best practice. The majority of LSCB training is delivered by partner organisations. While this ensures it is specialist and Gateshead-specific, the availability of trainers has reduced due to other pressures. As a result, some training in 2014/15 was cancelled. Many events were oversubscribed and 35% of all applicants were unsuccessful in obtaining a place (176) while a similar number (164) were offered a place and did not attend. The LSCB launched a programme of e-learning modules in December 2010 to increase sufficiency and offer greater flexibility. Initial responses were slow, but have improved. The LSCB's analysis of the quality of training and whether it is reaching those who would benefit most is not robust. It has not undertaken any recent training needs analysis and evaluation of the quality of training is over-reliant on self-reporting on the day. This is almost always very positive but cannot measure the impact of learning on outcomes for children. Participants are asked to complete a survey three months after the event to identify the difference that training has made to their practice but managers are not included and response rates are poor. Consequently, the impact of training on practice over time is not fully evaluated or understood. The LSCB plans to develop a quality assessment tool over the coming months to evaluate current training and its delivery more effectively.
122. The LSCB can however evidence clear improvements in practice on the ground as a result of some training. As a result of LSCB challenge to the clinical commissioning group (CCG), 100% of GPs in Gateshead have completed multi-agency (level 3) training. This increased awareness, combined with a new post commissioned by the CCG to assist GPs in writing reports for child protection conferences, has led to a significant improvement in the numbers of GP reports provided, from 10% in 2014–15 to 38% in quarter one 2015–16.
123. The LSCB has adopted a thematic approach to its multi-agency case auditing through a series of inquiries informed by national research and local drivers.

The LSCB undertook the first inquiry into neglect in 2014–2015 due to high numbers of children subject to child protection plans under the category. A further inquiry into child sexual exploitation is planned for 2015–16. The Neglect Inquiry scrutinised the application of thresholds and effectiveness of services provided at every stage of the child’s journey. It identified that while no children were subject to child protection plans inappropriately, some opportunities to intervene at an earlier stage had been missed. As a result of this learning, new guidance has been developed for practitioners and a commissioned service has been engaged to train all staff in using a tool to identify and respond to neglect based on the graded care profile. While the LSCB anticipates this should result in a more consistent identification of neglect and lead to more effective help at an early stage, the guidance is yet to be disseminated and monitoring of other practice has reduced. For example, no single agency auditing has been reported to or analysed by the LSCB performance management sub-group in the last 12 months.

124. The multi-agency data set used by the LSCB does not effectively support the monitoring and evaluation of all frontline practice. Although it considers children’s and young people’s experience from early help to care leavers, it is insufficiently linked to board priorities. The data set does not include some performance information in relation to children the LSCB has identified as particularly vulnerable, such as disabled children. Until very recently it did not include children missing from home or care or are at risk of child sexual exploitation. The LSCB recognises this has hampered its monitoring of prevalence and its analysis of the effectiveness of the wide range of multi-agency and single agency initiatives taking place. A failure to provide data by some agencies including CYPS and probation and no workforce information mean that the LSCB does not have a complete picture of the performance and effectiveness of local services at a time of widespread organisational change.
125. The LSCB has not developed a performance management framework nor uses any performance indicators to measure its performance. Statutory partners in Gateshead know each other well and operate in a culture of mutual trust and shared ambition for children. Nonetheless, it is important that the LSCB has clearly defined quantitative and qualitative measures for holding partners to account and for assessing its own effectiveness. In the absence of a clear quality assurance framework, the LSCB is overly reliant on partners bringing issues in their own agencies to the LSCB’s attention. Agencies’ perceptions of the relevance of issues within their own organisation or the LSCB as a whole can be inaccurate. Some LSCB members spoken to had an overly positive view of the LSCB’s performance.
126. The LSCB ensures that policy and procedures are updated regularly to reflect changes nationally and locally, with clear links to detailed guidance. They are included in the LSCB training offer. For example, training on FGM has been updated to include recently revised guidance. This proactive approach, combined with a focus on FGM in the summer edition of the LSCB newsletter,

ensured increased awareness in a wide range of agencies at a time when women and girls are most at risk.

127. The Gateshead Child Sexual Exploitation strategy (updated in May 2015) is consistent with revised guidance. The delivery plan is robust. It includes key ACPO strategic priorities of Prevent; Protect; Pursue and Prepare. Good collaborative working between LSCB sub-groups has resulted in a holistic, whole-systems approach to child sexual exploitation. Initiatives include workshops based on the theatre production of 'Chelsea's choice', which 2,500 children attended in November 2014, and 700 taxi drivers received mandatory training as part of the conditions of retaining their licence in August 2015. Over 500 practitioners attended a sub-regional conference on child sexual exploitation in October 2015. This collaboration and the ongoing work of the licensing sub-group to use its powers to oppose licensing applications that may present a risk to children, for example by selling 'legal highs' to young people, is a significant strength.
128. The LSCB coordinates multi-agency responses to prevent extremism appropriately and partners report progress to the LSCB regularly. The LSCB has taken a lead in awareness-raising activities. Prevention of extremism is included in its multi-agency training offer. In August 2015, a workshop was held to raise awareness of the Prevent duty for frontline staff. As a result of these initiatives, understanding of the potential targeting of young people by extremist groups as a form of exploitation has increased. The LSCB recognises that it needs to engage more meaningfully with this and other faith groups to promote the safeguarding agenda. Plans to establish a multi-faith group sub-group are at an early stage of development. The involvement of faith and ethnic minority groups in the LSCB at the point of inspection was underdeveloped.
129. The LSCB has ensured a programme of Section 11 audits on a yearly basis. As a result of effective challenge by the LSCB, the majority of agencies had provided a sufficient response by March 2015. More recently, as a result of good collaboration between the LSCB and the CCG, as of November 2015 almost all GP practices had submitted an audit. While the initial findings of the Section 11 audits were positive, some responses were too limited for the LSCB to be fully satisfied that effective arrangements were in place. Education Gateshead, for example, provided an overarching response but did not report on individual audits completed by schools under section 175 of the Education Act 2002. The LSCB has taken authoritative action to strengthen arrangements for next year and outcomes of all schools' section 175 audits will be included. Peer reviews of safeguarding arrangements have been identified as a means of further assurance. To date, one visit has been completed. This initiative shows promise but is in the early stages and not all agencies have committed to the process.
130. The LSCB has a comprehensive local learning and improvement framework with statutory partners, including procedures for serious case reviews (SCRs) and multi-agency and single-agency learning reviews. This represents a proactive

response by agencies to improve practice as a result of learning. Multi-agency briefings were held around the time of publication to ensure that staff understood the lessons and the resulting changes in practice. All practitioners spoken to during the inspection had attended briefings and almost all could articulate the lessons learned. Wider learning from local and national SCRs is included in the LSCB training offer.

131. The child death overview panel (CDOP) is shared with two neighbouring local authorities. Although publication of the CDOP annual report has been significantly delayed, Gateshead-specific information was included in the LSCB annual report. Findings show that the pattern of modifiable child deaths seen locally reflects those seen nationally, such as in relation to co-sleeping or smoking. Gateshead participates in regional campaigns to raise awareness.
132. The LSCB annual report is overly descriptive. It does not always include contextual information on areas for development, which makes it difficult for the lay reader to understand the link to performance. It does not include reference to private fostering arrangements. This is a missed opportunity to promote awareness of this vulnerable group of children to a wider audience.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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