

Knowsley Council

Re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

Inspection date: 13 March 2017 to 24 March 2017

Report published: 13 June 2017

Children’s services in Knowsley require improvement to be good		
1. Children who need help and protection		Requires improvement
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Requires improvement
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance		Good

Executive summary

Services and outcomes for all children have significantly improved since the last inspection in 2014, when Knowsley children's social care was found to be inadequate overall. The local authority has achieved these improvements through a wholesale and effective cultural and structural transformation. Senior leaders have focused on creating an environment in which good social work can, and increasingly does, flourish. The director of children's services and his senior leadership team have been strongly supported by a council-wide strategy that makes improving outcomes for vulnerable children in Knowsley 'everybody's business'.

The local authority's collaboration with key partner agencies is well informed by a detailed understanding of the needs of children in Knowsley. A shared strategic determination across agencies to promote children's welfare means that children are increasingly receiving effective preventative services at a time that is right for them. When children need additional help, they are promptly identified through the multi-agency safeguarding hub.

The local authority has been highly successful in recruiting and retaining a stable workforce in a challengingly competitive market. As a result, caseloads have reduced to manageable levels and workers are able to make positive trusting relationships that endure with children. Training in the use of a range of good-quality direct work tools supports staff well in ascertaining children's wishes and feelings.

Due to a strong focus on driving up standards, the quality of practice for children who require help and protection and children looked after has significantly improved, but is still too variable to be judged as good. This is indicative of the scale of improvement needed that was seen at the last inspection.

Responses to children recently and currently referred to children's social care are good. However, many children known to the local authority for some time have not had their needs reassessed. Care planning is not always sufficiently informed by a clear analysis of children's lived experience or by whether there has been sufficient improvement in outcomes. As a result, some children in need of help and protection continue to experience neglect.

Preventative services for children on the edge of care are a strength, and decisions for children to become looked after are proportionate. Most children looked after live in stable placements that meet their needs. However, the quality of assessments and care planning remains variable. While independent reviewing officers' oversight of practice is routine, their challenge is not always effective in improving practice and escalation processes are underused. Children's health needs are met well, and includes good-quality therapeutic support for their emotional health. However, the local authority recognises that, despite significant improvement, the quality of personal education plans for children looked after is not yet good enough, and not enough children are achieving their full educational potential.

The local authority has made excellent progress in promoting permanence for children through adoption, and the service, which was inadequate at the last inspection, is now good. Care leavers are well supported to make a successful transition to adulthood. They develop trusting relationships with staff who are tenacious in helping them to make the right choices and develop the right skills.

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The local authority

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates four children's homes. Three were judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection. (One is a new home and is awaiting a full inspection.)
- The previous single inspection of local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers was in April 2014. The overall effectiveness of the local authority was judged to be inadequate. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection were judged to be inadequate. The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence were judged to require improvement. The graded judgment for adoption performance was that it was inadequate. The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers was that they required improvement. Leadership, management and governance were judged to be inadequate.
- The local authority has had six monitoring visits from Ofsted to support improvement since it was found to be inadequate, two of which have been published.
- The most recent monitoring visit in relation to children who need help and protection was in August 2016. The visit identified that progress had been made towards achieving the priority actions in the area of help and protection.
- The most recent monitoring visit in relation to children looked after was in November 2016. The visit identified that progress had been made towards achieving the priority actions in the area of achieving permanence for children, including adoption.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since November 2014.
- The chief executive has been in post since November 2014.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has been in post since July 2014.
- The local authority uses a risk assessment model of intervention, which incorporates some tools from the 'Signs of Safety' model of social work.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 32,486 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Knowsley. This is 22% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 30% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:

- in primary schools is 26% (the national average is 15%)
- in secondary schools is 34% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 5% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic group of children and young people in the area is Asian British.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 3% (the national average is 20%)
 - in secondary schools is 1% (the national average is 16%).

Child protection in this area

- At 28 February 2017, 1,235 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children’s service. This is a reduction from 1,497 at 31 March 2016.
- At 28 February 2017, 225 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 69 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 209 (64 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 28 February 2017, three children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from two at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years before inspection, 19 serious incident notifications were submitted to Ofsted and five serious case reviews were completed.
- There are no serious case reviews ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 28 February 2017, 294 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 91 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 290 (89 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
 - 137 (or 47%) live outside the local authority area
 - 29 live in residential children’s homes, of whom 20 live out of the authority area
 - one lives in a residential special school¹ that is out of the authority area
 - 202 live with foster families, of whom 47% live out of the authority area
 - 45 live with parents, of whom eight live out of the authority area
 - two children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

¹ This is a residential special school that looks after children for 295 days or less per year.

- In the past 12 months:
 - there have been 19 adoptions
 - 18 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 105 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 11% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - five young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - no young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that all plans and reviews of plans are focused on improving outcomes for children and young people and are informed by an up-to-date, holistic assessment of need. This includes child in need plans, child protection plans, care plans, pathway plans and personal education plans.
2. Ensure that the virtual school supports the educational attainment of children looked after effectively by rigorously holding schools to account.
3. Improve the standard of social work to families under the pre-proceedings phase of the Public Law Outline and ensure that the rationale for their entering or leaving pre-proceedings is clearly recorded.
4. Ensure that managers' and independent reviewing officers' oversight of practice is effective in achieving positive change for children.
5. Ensure that all written records are comprehensive and up to date, and include minutes of decision-making forums, such as legal planning meetings, so that the rationale for decisions is clear and accessible to children in later life.
6. Increase senior managers' oversight of the work undertaken with privately fostered children to ensure that the quality of practice with this group of children improves.
7. Ensure that child permanence reports are child centred and comprehensive, with sufficient detail to give a good understanding of birth parents' histories.
8. Ensure that all care leavers have access to and understand their health histories.

Summary for children and young people

- Since the last inspection, when services for children were poor, leaders in the council have made sure that workers have high-quality training and enough time to give children the help that they need. As a result, services for all children have improved and services for children who are adopted and care leavers are now good.
- Senior leaders are good at listening to children and making sure that their voices are heard. They use what children tell them about their experiences to help to improve services for all children.
- Social workers visit children often and spend time getting to know them and understanding their wishes and feelings, so that they can make plans to help them. Some of these plans are good. Sometimes, plans do not take into account changes in children's lives, and workers and managers do not always think about whether the help that they are giving children is making enough difference. Social workers should make sure that all plans state clearly what social workers want to do for children and how and when they are going to do it.
- Independent reviewing officers, who run some meetings, know children well and see them often. When they think that plans to help children are not good enough or not happening as quickly as they should, they tell managers and social workers, but do not always tell senior leaders if things still do not improve.
- Social workers are good at finding the right families for children who need adoption, and do not give up even if it takes a long time. Adopted children are given plenty of help so that they settle in with their new families quickly.
- When young people leave care, they are given good support by workers who are available at times when they need help most, such as evenings and weekends. This helps them to make the right choices and to develop the right skills for success in adult life.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
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Inspection findings

9. Since the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in the services provided to children in need of help and protection, and progress has been made in respect of all recommendations. Practice has substantially improved, and no children have been found to be at immediate risk during this inspection. However, overall, the quality of social work practice and the outcomes for children are not yet consistently good.
10. Children in need of help and protection receive a timely response from the multi-agency safeguarding hub. Social workers gather information and apply well-understood thresholds to ensure that children receive a swift response, whatever their levels of need. When children are at risk of immediate harm, a quick response ensures that they are protected and that risk is reduced. Strategy discussions, which are undertaken routinely as multi-agency meetings, are well attended by partners. Strong management oversight ensures good information sharing and effective consideration of risk. Qualified staff undertake appropriate investigations, children are seen and spoken to, and decision making is timely and appropriate.
11. Children recently referred as children in need of help or protection have their needs assessed in a timely way. The majority of these assessments are of good quality and use effective analysis to come to appropriate conclusions. Social workers undertake direct work to try to understand the views of children and record them to inform assessment and care planning.
12. Following investigation, children at risk of significant harm are considered at initial child protection conferences that result in multi-agency child protection plans to address the issues of risk.
13. Children in need, including those with disabilities, have assessments completed in a timely way that result in child in need plans and a range of support. All children have a multi-agency plan that is reviewed regularly, but recording of this work is not always timely.
14. The quality of care planning for children in need and those on child protection plans is variable. Most of the records seen require improvement. While all plans record some appropriate multi-agency intervention, some have unrealistic targets and lack timescales. Plans are not sufficiently focused on measuring progress and, as a result, are not always effective in improving outcomes for children. Children do not routinely have their needs reassessed to update plans or to inform key decision making. This is a particular challenge where children or families are resistant to intervention. In situations when social workers and partners cannot undertake direct work, they do not

supplement this with their own analysis of what life might be like for children. As a result, evaluations of children's lived experiences do not always inform care plans. (Recommendation)

15. Partners attend core groups that take place regularly, but meetings do not consistently evaluate the progress of the plan or whether it is resulting in positive change for children. Sometimes, although the child's circumstances have not changed, increased parental engagement is viewed as evidence that intervention has been successful. As a result, the work of core groups is not yet consistently effective, particularly in responding to children who have suffered historical drift and delay. (Recommendation)
16. All children reported missing from home are offered independent return interviews via a commissioned specialist service to discuss the reasons for their absence. In many cases, this interview results in direct work which reduces future risk. There is further work to do to ensure that the information gathered in these interviews informs care planning and that it is used more widely to consider any themes or trends when children go missing.
17. The multi-agency response to children in need of help and protection, and children looked after who are at risk of child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, is generally very rigorous and effective in addressing the presenting issues. However, the weaknesses in care planning sometimes result in a lack of focus on tackling underlying issues of neglect and emotional abuse that make some children susceptible to all forms of exploitation.
18. A review of early help services has resulted in an improved multi-agency offer of support and intervention to children and families in need. The 'Family first' service, developed in 2016, provides well-coordinated and effective support to families identified as requiring a multi-agency response but who do not yet meet the threshold for a social work service, with good-quality assessment and well-coordinated multi-agency plans. Early help across the partnerships for children at a lower level of need is improving, but there is still work to do to increase the numbers of children reached and the quality of intervention.
19. The local authority tracks children missing from education to ensure that they are safe and that children who are educated at home are well monitored. Despite some good work with schools on attendance, there is more to do to support improvement in all schools and a need for more robust monitoring of the pupil premium.
20. Children living in families in which there is domestic abuse are offered a good range of services for victims and perpetrators at all levels of need that, for many children, are effective in reducing risk.
21. There are very low numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements. The quality of assessments and wider care planning for these children is not strong enough. (Recommendation)

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Requires improvement
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Inspection findings

22. Services to children on the edges of care are a strength. Well-resourced care packages are drawn together by a resource panel. Wraparound support is given to very vulnerable families, helping some to make positive changes so that children can remain safely in their care. When children need to become looked after, comparatively few are looked after by voluntary agreement with parents under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and, in cases seen, this was appropriate to the circumstances. This ensures that decisions for children to be looked after benefit from early scrutiny by the courts.
23. When social work with children has not resulted in positive change, the local authority routinely considers whether the threshold for care proceedings is met at legal planning meetings chaired by senior managers. While the local authority has implemented systems under the Public Law Outline (PLO) for tracking progress, these are not fully effective in preventing delay prior to decisions to issue court proceedings. The quality of social work undertaken with families in the pre-proceedings phase of the PLO is variable and, for some children, is not timely. Case records do not always contain an evaluation of progress or the rationale for decision making to enter or leave pre-proceedings, making it difficult for families to understand what may happen should circumstances deteriorate in the future. (Recommendation)
24. The quality of documentation presented to court to support care proceedings is satisfactory. This is in a large part credited by partners, such as the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the judiciary, to the quality of legal advice that social workers receive. Assessments for court, such as the viability of family members to care for children looked after or whether brothers and sisters should live together or apart, are generally of a good quality. However, reassessment of children's needs once they are in long-term care is not routine and too often focuses on specific circumstances, such as changes in contact arrangements. This means that plans for permanence other than for adoption are not routinely supported by an up-to-date and holistic assessment of children's needs. (Recommendation)
25. Notwithstanding court-led directions to place children with their parents during proceedings, opportunities for children to return home are routinely explored and mostly take place in a planned way. However, not all decisions to return children home are the subject of a risk assessment that thoroughly considers parental capacity to build on and sustain positive change.
26. Once a plan is made for permanence, all children looked after are allocated to specialist children looked after social workers who have manageable caseloads

and can come to know them well. Social workers visit children at least to the statutory minimum number of times, and compliance is checked at regular management supervision sessions. However, written records do not always reflect the work undertaken and, in a few cases seen, were poor (Recommendation). Children's contact with their families is well managed, supervised when appropriate and recorded well.

27. Specialist nurses ensure that an initial health assessment is routinely undertaken and that it informs future healthcare plans. When children need support for their emotional health, it is generally timely and includes specialist therapeutic support through commissioned services. The quality of personal education plans (PEPs) is improving and nearly all have been monitored by the virtual school, but they are still not of consistently good enough quality to support sustained pupil attainment. The local authority recognises that the role of the virtual school in holding schools to account requires strengthening, and it plans to improve its capacity to do so in the near future. (Recommendation)
28. While a high proportion of children looked after in Knowsley (45%) are placed outside of the local authority, the majority are placed in local authorities which border, or are close to the border with, Knowsley. In cases seen, children are not disadvantaged by distance, and the local authority supplements the use of its own in-house resources through sound commissioning arrangements that procure and quality assure placements well to safeguard children. All children seen are in placements that are safe and meeting their needs. In the small number of cases in which children looked after are not White British, assessment and planning generally omit what it is like to be that child in a local environment that is not ethnically diverse.
29. All children looked after are allocated to an independent reviewing officer (IRO) who knows them well and visits them at least prior to each review. In some cases seen, the IRO is proactive in pursuing the care plan. However, in others, while IRO challenge was in evidence, it was not always effective and this had not been escalated to senior managers. (Recommendation)
30. Most children in long-term care live with adults with whom they can form a permanent attachment. However, formal matching with long-term carers can be delayed and, although the use of special guardianship orders as an option for permanence has increased, this is not always timely and could be more effectively prioritised.
31. A highly creative Children in Care Council, MADE (Making a difference everywhere), is well connected with the corporate parenting board. The local authority is highly responsive to the suggestions of children looked after for improvements in their care, and the children spoken to clearly feel that their views are respected and acted on.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good

32. Children who are in need of adoption are identified at the earliest stage in the planning process. The local authority rigorously monitors the progress of children's plans to prevent delay. When there is delay, it is due to the complex circumstances of the individual child, and any impact on children is fully understood and minimised.
33. There is a sufficiency and diversity of potential adopters which promotes choice for Knowsley children who need adoptive families. At the time of the inspection, only two children were waiting and a match had been identified for both of them.
34. Family finding is purposeful and effective for children who need families with their brothers and sisters, older children or children who have complex needs. This sometimes means that family finding takes longer than the recommended timescales. In Knowsley, many children in need of adoption come from large families. Knowsley is very successful in ensuring that brothers and sisters remain together when it is right for them to do so, enabling children to maintain these most important of relationships through life. Decisions to separate children are informed by thorough assessment of individual children's needs and careful consideration of how future contact will be promoted. At the time of the inspection, there were 11 brother and sister groups in the adoption process.
35. Matching of children to their new parents is well informed by a detailed understanding of potential adopters' strengths and circumstances. Prospective adopters' reports are well written and reflective, and effectively underpin the matching process. This facilitates decision making by the adoption panel and the agency decision maker. Child permanence reports (CPRs), while generally of a standard that is rigorous enough to make informed decisions, are not always as effective in giving an understanding of the child, and a few require more detail to understand birth parents' histories. The adoption panel is effective in its quality assurance of reports and appropriately challenges practice issues when necessary. Consequently, the quality of CPRs is improving. (Recommendation)
36. Due to the rigour in matching children with their new parents, the risk of disruption is minimised. The local authority has had one adoption disruption since 2012, which was appropriately scrutinised and learning disseminated.
37. Adopters told inspectors that the assessment process is transparent and they were well supported through each stage. A particular strength is the direct work that is offered to children in making the transition to their new families, and the proactive and effective use of the adoption support fund to provide a wide range of creative post-adoption support.

38. The local authority has made significant improvement in placing children successfully for adoption, as seen in the improved picture for children whose plan changed from adoption. In 2016–17, only one child’s plan changed to an alternative form of permanence, and this has been achieved. However, the local authority has not been as successful in considering and promoting fostering to adopt as an option for achieving timely permanence.
39. Adoption performance, year on year, is an improving picture. At the time of the inspection, there were 38 children in the adoption process, and 20 adoptions had already been achieved in 2016–17. Adoption performance in relation to timeliness reported over a three-year period does not meet expected timescales. This is in part a legacy of earlier poor practice. However, it also reflects the local authority’s determination to secure adoption for children who need it and who have complex needs or circumstances. Children who have become looked after more recently are achieving permanence through adoption in a more timely way.

<p>The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is good</p>

40. Care leavers in Knowsley are well supported to make a successful transition to adulthood. They develop trusting relationships with staff, who ‘go the extra mile’ to ensure that they are helped to make the right choices and develop the right skills. Personal advisers are tenacious in keeping in touch with even the most reluctant care leavers. At the time of the inspection, they were in touch with all care leavers, including some who are living very unsettled lives.
41. The local authority provides a service to care leavers which is responsive to the issues that they face. Personal advisers work at evenings and weekends so that they are available at times when young people are likely to need the most support. Care leavers report that they feel safe and are confident of receiving appropriate support and advice, and that they are supported to consider risks, for example in relation to child sexual exploitation, substance and alcohol misuse, mental health and debt. The local authority is increasingly successful in promoting ‘staying put’ arrangements with former foster carers as an option for care leavers. At the time of the inspection, 19 care leavers remained living in their former foster homes beyond their 18th birthdays, enabling them to develop skills for independence and adulthood at their own pace in a family environment. Care leavers have access to a good range of accommodation options to meet individual needs, and the local authority housing service prioritises care leavers for tenancies. As a result, almost all care leavers are in suitable accommodation, and the local authority engages regularly with the few who are not and vigorously encourages them to consider suitable housing choices.

42. Pathway plans have been recently changed to make them more meaningful, as active plans to help young people plan for their futures, but too many written plans still lack specific actions and consideration of contingency planning. They do not reflect the good quality of the direct work undertaken with care leavers that, in cases seen, is demonstrably improving outcomes for them. Social and leisure opportunities such as the Sunday dinner club, the Saturday morning 'pop in' and the climbing wall club mitigate against isolation and help to build resilience in young people. (Recommendation)
43. While care leavers understand their rights and entitlements and are well supported to have their current health needs met, not all of them fully understand or are provided with their health histories. The local authority had recognised this gap prior to the inspection and is prioritising addressing it.
44. The percentage of care leavers in Knowsley aged 19 to 21 who are not in employment, education or training is higher than national averages. This is reflective of wider challenges within the local population. The local authority's energy and commitment in improving access to education and employment have resulted in the rate of 16 to 17-year-olds who are in employment, education or training (EET), at 91%, matching the England rate for all young people. This is far better than Knowsley's general 16 to 17-year-old population. The local authority is by no means complacent and has developed a wide range of initiatives to support all care leavers into EET.
45. While some care leavers are active members of the Children in Care Council, MADE, there is not a separate group for care leavers, whose experiences are often very different from children looked after, and not all care leavers spoken to were aware of the Children's Charter.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
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Inspection findings

46. Senior leaders and elected members are visible, accessible and well informed. They are highly aspirational, aiming to provide children with high-quality services that achieve good outcomes for them. Good strategic planning, such as the development of an education neglect strategy, combined with effective partnership working with key statutory partners – demonstrated, for example, in the transformation of the multi-agency safeguarding hub – mean that children in Knowsley are receiving an increasing range of high-quality, effective services.
47. Strategic planning and delivery of commissioned services are well informed by a detailed exploration of the needs of and risks to children in Knowsley. This includes specific risks, such as domestic abuse, the use of cannabis, child sexual exploitation and criminality. An effective overarching multi-agency strategy to prevent and protect children from all forms of exploitation has resulted in some innovative practice, such as routine uses of multi-systemic therapy and high-quality services for children at risk of exploitation, provided through multi-agency arrangements. Children in Knowsley placed by other local authorities are offered the same level of service, and this is very good practice. The local authority has achieved significant improvement in social work practice at every stage in the child’s journey through effective leadership and creating the right environment for good social work to flourish. It has implemented a highly successful workforce recruitment and retention strategy, resulting in a stable workforce. At the time of the inspection, 76% of the workforce had been with the local authority for longer than 12 months and only four social workers were agency workers. All of them had been with the authority for longer than two years. This represents a significant reduction in the high staff turnover and high percentage of agency staff seen at the last inspection.
48. The local authority has achieved this stability through a whole-systems approach that includes access to good-quality training and opportunities for high-performing staff to progress. As a result, staff morale is high and turnover of staff is low. These improvements, combined with reducing caseloads, mean that children have opportunities to form stable relationships with staff who know them well.
49. The local authority has invested in providing workers with high-quality tools to support them to do their job well. This includes an improved physical environment and technology to support mobile working, as well as tools to support effective practice with children and families, for example direct-work tools that enhance social work analysis and elicit the wishes and feelings of children.

50. Senior leaders undertake a wide range of activities that ensure that they have a detailed understanding of the experiences of children in Knowsley, including visits to frontline teams, consultation with children, regular informed scrutiny of performance management information and participation in quality assurance activity, such as auditing.
51. Oversight of practice by frontline managers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) is routine and increasingly focused on improving outcomes for children. However, its role in driving improvement is not yet consistently evident. Nevertheless, the current quality of oversight is in stark contrast to that at the last inspection, when scrutiny of practice by managers and IROs was largely absent. (Recommendation)
52. The local authority has embedded a culture of performance management. It has invested in ensuring that its electronic system provides high-quality accurate performance management information that is user friendly. Performance management information is routinely used by elected members, senior leaders and frontline managers to understand and improve frontline practice. Findings from performance management information are used well to inform quality assurance activity.
53. Quality assurance of casework is well established and underpinned by an appropriate quality assurance framework. As part of the framework, the local authority has an established cycle of audit of casework. However, audit findings are not consistently rigorous, and the local authority recognises that this has the potential to impact on the effectiveness of learning from audit and its understanding of the quality of practice. It recognises that further action is required to achieve consistency, and has appropriate plans to strengthen arrangements and support less-experienced staff.
54. The local authority has embraced opportunities to learn from external scrutiny. It has responded positively to constructive challenge from a range of sources, including Ofsted monitoring visits, peer reviews, Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) and rigorous challenge from the improvement board, which is chaired by a knowledgeable and highly effective chair. Improvements to services seen in this inspection as a result of this learning include restructure of the out-of-hours service to ensure a more responsive service, and better communication between daytime and night-time staff.
55. The local authority, along with partner agencies through KSCB, undertakes a wide range of activities to ensure that services and practice are informed and developed through consultation with children. The Children in Care Council, MADE, for example, is regularly consulted and has made a valuable contribution to improving services, such as participation in producing a virtual memory box to save personal memories for children in need of help and protection, as well as children looked after.

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 that 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 whom 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.

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.

The inspection team consisted of five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

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