

Nottinghamshire County 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

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Children's services in Nottinghamshire County Council are good

Good leadership means that children and young people are protected, the risks to them are identified and managed through timely decisions and the help provided reduces the risk of, or actual, harm to them.

Children and young people looked after, those returning home and those moving to or living in permanent placements outside of their immediate birth family have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

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.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates seven children's homes, including one secure unit. Six were judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- An inspection of safeguarding and arrangements for looked after children took place in March 2010 and found overall effectiveness of safeguarding services to be inadequate. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children was judged to be adequate.
- A follow up inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children took place in September 2011. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Local leadership

- The Acting Director of Children's Services has been in post since April 2015.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since April 2009.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 162,500 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Nottinghamshire. This is 20.5% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 17% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 14% (the national average is 17%)
 - in secondary schools is 12% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are any other white, white and black Caribbean and any other mixed background.

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.

- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 6% (the national average is 19%)
 - in secondary schools is 4% (the national average is 14%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2015, 4,287 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 4,930 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31 March 2015, 692 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 587 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31 March 2015, 14 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from 21 at 31 March 2014.
- Since the last inspection, 10 serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and seven serious case reviews have been completed or were on-going at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2015, 841 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 52 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 826 (51 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2014.
 - Of this number, 291 (or 35%) live outside the local authority area
 - 75 live in residential children's homes, of whom 33 (44%) live out of the authority area
 - five live in residential special schools³, of whom four (80%) live out of the authority area
 - 629 live with foster families, of whom 187 (30%) live out of the authority area
 - six live with parents, of whom four (67%) live out of the authority area
 - 32 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 97 adoptions
 - 52 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 372 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 55 (15%) subsequently returned to be looked after

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

- 89 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
- 13 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Executive summary

Enduring stability in the senior leadership team over the last five years, combined with strong and active involvement by elected members, have seen the county council respond very effectively to poor findings from previous inspections. A substantial financial investment, a clear focus on what needed to be done and a determination to improve services for children and families have resulted in significant progress being made. Improvements to the way children's services are now delivered are evident in the number of children currently receiving a service that meets their identified needs. Performance management information is used well, although there is more to be achieved in exploring the impact of early help services.

Robust senior management oversight, a renewed focus on social work practice and an effective case auditing programme have seen the council respond positively to a history of poor practice, which left some children living for far too long in neglectful and challenging circumstances. An increase in the number of children on child protection plans, children being appropriately looked after and an improving picture of looked after children living much closer to home, mean that children are now safer and better protected.

Developing a workforce with sufficient capacity, skills and expertise to support children and families has been a challenge and remains so. Competing for experienced social workers with neighbouring authorities has contributed to a commitment by the council to improve the working environment. Effective support packages, including practice consultants working within teams to improve consistency of practice, effective caseload management, better technical support for remote working and the introduction of business support services in some teams have all been implemented successfully. The reliance on agency staff is reducing.

The transformation programme has led to a reconfiguration of service delivery. New structures are now well embedded, including a single point of entry for contacts and referrals through a well-established multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). The multi-agency threshold for services document 'Pathway to Provision' is well understood. There is a good range of support services to help children and families. Children living in households where domestic violence, mental health issues and substance misuse are prevalent are well supported. However, the waiting list for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is too long. Delays have occurred in completing assessments for children and young people who are privately fostered.

Children missing from home, care and education and those at risk of being sexually exploited are known about and well supported. Return home interviews are influential in identifying patterns of behaviour and support careful planning to further reduce risks. Information gathered is used well to inform multi-agency operational 'hot spot' meetings.

Social work practice is effective and well-managed, with good outcomes being achieved for children and young people. Children are seen and seen alone, their wishes and feelings are known and understood and their views are generally

reflected well in assessments and decisions being made about them. Cases being stepped-down to early help provision or stepped-up for social care intervention are managed effectively. Diversity is addressed well, including the use of interpreters, placement matching and work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Management oversight of case work is good. Some practice is less robust with some assessments being too descriptive and lacking sufficient analysis. Strategy discussions do not routinely include education and health partners and recording is not sufficiently detailed. Police do not routinely attend initial and review child protection conferences.

Strong collaborative arrangements with the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board have seen learning from case audits and outcomes from national and local serious case reviews support further improvements to social work practice.

Families on the edge of care are well supported. When children cannot remain with their families, court processes supported by legal planning meetings and the Public Law Outline are effective and timely. Many more children and young people are now entering care at the right time and for the right reasons. Looked after children and young people genuinely enjoy good relationships with their social workers. Improvements are required to ensure that the health needs of looked after children are met, such as dental checks and immunisations. The virtual school is tenacious in ensuring that looked after children and young people make better progress in their learning. It monitors the progress and achievement of young people well, attendance at school is good and performance at most key stages is improving.

Nottinghamshire Adoption Service is highly effective. A dedicated specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for looked after and adopted children, sensitive and well-illustrated life story books and effective post-adoption support are outstanding features of the service. However, despite the council's best efforts in family finding, a small number of children continue to experience some delay in finding permanent families and are left in uncertain situations for too long.

Services for care leavers have yet to benefit fully from the transformation programme, which initially focused on the immediate priorities to safeguard children and young people. Their lack of inclusion, until quite recently, in the looked after children and care leavers' strategy indicates that their needs have not received high priority. The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee has not had sufficient oversight of services for care leavers. Improvements have yet to be made to the quality of pathway plans, and care leavers do not routinely receive copies of their health history. Action is being taken to improve the range of accommodation available. Information regarding some care leavers such as those at risk of sexual exploitation is not analysed so that resources can be targeted more effectively.

Children and young people feel valued and know that their views are incorporated into service delivery. They are justifiably proud of the contribution they make to support service improvement.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that care leavers are given information about their health histories and that work is completed to understand the health needs of care leavers so that resources can be better targeted. (Paragraphs 101 - 103)
2. Ensure that pathway plans are more specific regarding actions and timescales and that work is followed up and reviewed regularly. (Paragraphs 104 - 105)
3. Gather and use management information pertaining to care leavers who are missing, at risk of sexual exploitation, substance misusers or offenders, to understand needs and allocate resources. (Paragraph 109)
4. Implement, monitor and review the 16+ accommodation strategy and engage with providers, district and borough councils to drive improvements. (Paragraph 106)
5. Review the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee to ensure that it has active oversight of services for care leavers. (Paragraph 109)
6. Raise the awareness of private fostering and improve the response and timeliness of assessments when arrangements are identified. (Paragraph 46)
7. Ensure that the collection and analysis of information about the effectiveness and impact of the council's arrangements for services to children and young people who receive early help are improved to better inform practice and service development. (Paragraph 17)
8. Ensure that relevant partner agencies are included in child protection strategy discussions, initial and review conferences so that decisions and investigations are fully informed and benefit from their knowledge and information. (Paragraphs 22 - 23)
9. Improve the consistency of social work practice across the service with regard to recording and the quality of analysis in assessments. (Paragraphs 22, 24)
10. Work with partners to ensure that mental health services for vulnerable children and young people are provided promptly when required. (Paragraph 32)
11. Work with partners to improve the timeliness of dental checks and immunisations and the completion rates of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire, to better inform the overall health needs of looked after children. (Paragraphs 56, 57)

Summary for children and young people

- In 2009 and 2010 we found that services in Nottinghamshire for children who needed help and protection were poor. At our inspections in February 2011 and September 2011 we found that the council had made considerable progress in improving services. In this inspection we found that most services for children and young people are now good. Council leaders and managers are determined to improve services even further and they are doing well.
- The council knows what it still needs to do to further improve services for children and young people, and managers are taking effective action to address the weaknesses that are still there. They know that services for care leavers have not had high priority, as they have been making sure that other areas of the service were safe. They agree that they need to do more to improve these services and they are taking action to do this very quickly. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors said they feel safe, but services for them are not yet good enough.
- Managers know that young people wait too long when they have emotional or mental health problems, and they have a plan to improve this.
- When people report a serious worry about a child, staff act quickly to help keep children safe.
- Young people, parents, social workers, teachers, police officers and other professionals have all been given lots of information about how to help keep children and young people safe if they are at risk of sexual exploitation. They are working well together to reduce the dangers and risk to children and young people.
- Social workers work hard to find permanent families for children who need them and more children are now moving to live with an adoptive family or other family members or friends.
- Social workers spend a lot of time talking to the children and young people they work with to try to understand what their lives are like. This helps them make better decisions that make a difference to children and young people's lives.
- Children's and young people's views are important to the council. 'No Labels' (the children in care council), and Young Pioneers, a group for young people with additional needs, have worked hard with the council to change and develop services. This has led to a review of the Pledge to looked after children, the production of a DVD as part of an anti-bullying campaign, and the opportunity to shape new health services.
- Managers in children's services are good at checking that the social workers do what they should do to help children and keep them safe.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children, young people and families in Nottinghamshire receive help and protection from agencies in a timely way. Thresholds for services are well understood and applied appropriately.</p> <p>Early help services delivered by children's centres, targeted support, supporting families and family resource services are accessible and address a wide range of needs. In addition, the commissioning and development of early help services mean that children who do not meet the threshold for social work services receive timely and appropriate help.</p> <p>Almost all children who need help and protection are allocated to a social worker without delay and receive timely assessments which inform good child protection and children in need plans. The quality of assessments is good in the majority of cases and none seen by inspectors was inadequate. However, achieving greater consistency in the quality of assessments is an area for development, as is the timeliness of assessments of children who are privately fostered.</p> <p>Children's plans, including child in need plans, are now consistently good. Social workers are responsible for developing children's plans, which are then subject to effective regular management oversight and quality assurance. Decision making, management oversight and supervision are areas of strength.</p> <p>Multi-agency working, especially in child in need cases, is good and partners are consulted before major changes are made to a child's plan. However, strategy discussions do not routinely involve all relevant agencies and are not recorded in sufficient detail. The police do not routinely attend initial and review child protection conferences.</p> <p>Children's voices are heard, well-recorded and respected.</p> <p>Investment in technology, workforce capacity, business support staff and practice consultants have all had a positive impact on improving morale and social work practice in front line teams.</p> <p>Children and young people who go missing from home and children who are at risk of sexual exploitation receive well-planned and coordinated help and protection. This is underpinned by consistent and accountable strategic planning and multi-agency oversight, including case audits, training and the development of practice standards.</p> <p>The council uses management information well to promote good outcomes for children and to drive up standards and performance. However, information about the impact of early help and child sexual exploitation services is not fully utilised to ensure that resources are targeted effectively.</p> <p>Waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are unacceptably long. The council is working with health partners to reduce waiting times for treatment.</p>	

Inspection findings

12. The early help unit deals effectively with all new external enquiries and referrals from the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). The service is well organised and consists of workers with a broad range of experience and skills. This enables them to understand the needs of children, young people and their families and to refer them for the right support. The addition of a social worker to the team strengthens oversight and the quality of decision-making. This has resulted in a greater confidence to assess and manage risk appropriately within the unit.
13. Early help is mostly provided through the council's children's centres for younger children, and through the integrated targeted support teams and youth justice service for older children. Three targeted support teams enable families to have access to services in their local area. Three county-wide specialist teams conduct parenting assessments, undertake return interviews for children and young people who go missing from home and deliver help to young people who experience homelessness or substance misuse.
14. Early help assessments seen by inspectors were thorough and well-recorded. Outcomes for children and young people who received help from targeted support teams were good. Figures from the last three months show that children aged 12-16 years are by far the highest group (57%) in receipt of early help support. In 2014-15, 2,667 early help assessments were completed and the proportion where issues were fully resolved increased from 46% at the beginning of the year to 58% by the final quarter of the year. The target for next year is an ambitious 70% for the year as a whole.
15. The perinatal support service provides effective, targeted support to pregnant young women and young mothers. This befriending service, which is accessed through the early help arrangements, helps mothers in danger of becoming isolated and a risk to themselves and their child to regain their confidence. Support is implemented quickly following assessment, and mothers are provided with an effective bespoke package from a range of options which enables them to re-engage positively in the community. In addition, 58 trained volunteer champions to develop this work are well established across the county.
16. The MASH is well-resourced and responds effectively to all new enquiries. Good partnership working is evident in the MASH. Representatives from the police, health, adult services and education are based in the MASH; other agencies such as the probation service, early help, mental health services and trading standards are also available for additional advice and support.
17. Thresholds for services are well understood by staff and other agencies. This is reflected in the low numbers of enquiries which require no further action. The total number of referrals received has reduced from 17,836 in 2013-14 to 16,667 during 2014-15. However, this reduction cannot be directly linked to

the effectiveness of early help arrangements. Inspectors saw examples of good, well planned early help services that were improving outcomes for children and families, but the council's information about the impact of these services remains under-developed. For example, 47.9%, of children are on a child protection plan due to neglectful parenting; the impact of early help arrangements on reducing neglect is not yet fully understood. The authority is working to improve information systems to coincide with a reorganisation of early help arrangements planned for late 2015.

18. All staff are clear about cases where the family's consent is required before information can be shared. Consent is recorded clearly on children's files and in some child in need cases seen by inspectors enquiries and information-sharing were suspended until it could be established that the family had provided the necessary consent.
19. Domestic abuse notifications received from the police form the largest number of contacts. In most cases these are dealt with thoroughly and effectively, with risks clearly identified by a social worker. A daily meeting of social care managers, police and education representatives agrees the level of response to all domestic abuse notifications which have been graded medium or high risk. Schools are informed in line with 'Operation Encompass' to ensure they are able to respond to children who have witnessed incidents of domestic abuse.
20. Cases which need further social work assessment transfer quickly from the MASH to assessment teams. They are allocated to a social worker on the same day in the majority of cases. Cases deemed to be high risk are transferred immediately for further action.
21. Where assessment determines that children's cases do not reach the threshold for a child protection investigation, help is arranged through the child in need system or the provision of early help. The children in need service is prioritised well and multi-agency communication and planning are effective. Child in need plans receive regular management oversight and review, which are well-recorded. Service managers scrutinise these cases after nine months, and group managers if the plan remains in place for twelve months. Plans are detailed and include clear information about the help to be offered, the agencies who will deliver services to the family, timescales and the improvements needed before the plan can be ended. When children's plans come to an end this decision is agreed by the social worker's manager and formally reviewed by other agencies. Decisions are recorded well. The arrangements for ensuring children receive help at the right level when risks increase are also clear and operate effectively. This means that children's cases are purposefully reviewed by social workers and managers and that when the help being delivered is not having sufficient impact, alternative plans are put in place.
22. Strategy discussions are timely. However, the reasons for the concern and the rationale for the decisions are not always recorded in sufficient detail. Strategy

discussions seen by inspectors only involved social work managers and the police. Although decisions were appropriate to the risks identified, they did not benefit from the information and expertise of other partner agencies. In more complex areas of work, in particular child sexual exploitation, strategy discussions were multi-agency and recorded to a much higher standard.

23. Most child protection enquiries are timely. On average 87% are completed within timescales. However, performance is still too variable across the county, reducing to 74.5% in one area. Almost all initial child protection conferences (94.5%) are completed within 15 days of the decision to begin an investigation; this is a significant improvement on 85.2% in the previous year. Performance in respect of child protection reviews has also seen sustained improvement, with 99.6% of reviews completed on time between November 2014 and March 2015, an improvement on 97.4% for 2013–14. However, the police do not routinely attend initial and review child protection conferences.
24. Information and assessments presented to child protection conferences were at least of an adequate standard in all cases seen, and in the majority of cases were good. In cases which were good, assessments were clear, thorough and included relevant historical information and an analysis which helped to inform the child's plan. The council has a 'My child protection plan' document to record the child's view where the child is old enough to be consulted and this is used well. The council's performance in working in partnership with agencies and families to deliver timely and effective child protection arrangements has improved and is now good.
25. Child protection plans are outlined at the initial child protection case conference (ICPC) and fully developed at the first multi-agency core group. Children's plans are considered carefully by people who work directly with the family and the family themselves. In the last three months of 2014–15, 143 ICPCs were held and parental participation was high with 299 family members (80.8%) attending. Parents who spoke to inspectors said they understood the plans and knew what needed to change to reduce risk. The detailed child protection plans are reviewed by the social worker's manager and practice consultant to ensure they comply with the general areas specified by the conference. This practice is working well to improve the quality and effectiveness of plans. The role of the child protection conference chair has been strengthened. They provide social workers and managers with information about the quality of social work practice and routine reminders to ensure that plans do not drift. Child protection conference reports sampled by inspectors enabled parents and carers to read them before the conference, and contained appropriate historical and current detail.
26. Children are seen and seen alone regularly by their social workers, and their views are sought and well recorded. This is an area of strength. Inspectors saw examples of good quality, imaginative direct work with children and the information gained and recorded was used to influence children's plans.

27. Advocacy is available to children and young people via a commissioned service from an independent provider. However, this is dependent on a request from the social worker and is not routinely offered to all young people of an appropriate age who are subject to child protection conferences and other formal processes.
28. Multi-agency core groups track children's progress and plans are reviewed regularly to establish the level of risk. Core group records are reviewed by managers and practice consultants and the general standard of these records is at least adequate. The oversight applied to them means that few children's cases are subject to drift. This has helped to reduce year on year the percentage of child protection plans which have been in place for two or more years to 2.3% in 2013–14, which is better than the national average (2.6%). Performance is continuing to improve.
29. Children benefit from the help they receive through child protection arrangements. In one child protection review conference parents told the inspector they felt that their child was better cared for as a result of the parenting and other support they had received, and that the social worker had been clear and honest with them about the assessed risks and the actions they needed to take from the outset.
30. Parents who need help with substance misuse or domestic abuse benefit from a range of accessible non-statutory specialist services located across the county, which work in partnership with the council. Domestic abuse services include individual support, targeted support for children and young people and structured programmes. Inspectors saw examples of successful engagement with these services. However, there is limited provision for perpetrators of domestic violence. A voluntary organisation has seconded six specialist domestic abuse link workers (DALW) to the council's assessment teams. These provide guidance to social workers and work directly with families. This is a recent development and an example of good practice and imaginative collaboration with partners. However, it is not yet possible to demonstrate its impact on outcomes for children and families. The authority and the police have worked together effectively to develop a strategic plan for the commissioning of domestic abuse services. In June 2014 the police completed a detailed overview of the services and proposals for future funding in order to preserve and build on present provision; services will be subject to re-commissioning in late 2015.
31. The authority is providing child protection or child in need services to 812 children whose parents are affected by substance misuse, 795 whose parents have mental health problems and 409 children whose parents are affected by both. The commissioned substance misuse service for children and young people responds promptly and positively to referrals from children's social workers. Its staff engage fully in effective multi-agency planning and joint work.
32. Children and young people who need Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) experience unreasonable delays. The council's own figures

reveal that the waiting time from referral to treatment varies between 22 weeks and 35 weeks in different parts of the county. A review of the service is underway, underpinned by a £2 million investment by the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in the county.

33. The current structure of children's services and the practice of completing initial and core assessments lead to children being subjected to unnecessary changes of social worker. While the council's view is that this has been a necessary step in the development of the service, a single assessment will be introduced later in 2015.
34. Equality and diversity are considered well in assessments and plans. Inspectors saw examples of good practice where the full range of children's and families' needs was being considered. The availability and use of translation services and work in supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children to access legal advice and attend asylum hearing tribunals are good. Specialist domestic violence projects provide support to same sex couples.
35. Management oversight and supervision are strong. Social workers are supervised regularly and this is recorded clearly in their personal files with relevant case work decisions copied onto children's files. There is some variability in the format used across the service. However, this does not detract from the quality of management oversight.
36. The development of the social work practice consultant role has had a positive impact in improving the quality of practice, for example through training and reflective practice sessions. Practice consultants offer multi-agency problem solving meetings for challenging cases or cases that social workers regard as 'stuck', and ensure that research and good practice materials are disseminated to practitioners. They also have a specific role in the development of less experienced social workers, including co-working individual children's cases. Social workers are very positive about these arrangements and other examples of commitment to practice such as home working arrangements, mobile working technology and the recent employment of additional support staff in social work teams to enable social workers to spend more time working directly with children and families.
37. Decisive and responsible action is taken to respond to children and young people who go missing. The specialist children's missing officer receives regular reports from the police and ensures return interviews are always offered. A multi-agency meeting is arranged after the third missing episode. Over 70% of young people take up the offer of a return interview, and 70% of these interviews take place within 72 hours of the young person's return. The link between this behaviour and vulnerability to sexual exploitation is acknowledged and understood. Information gathered is used well to inform multi-agency operational 'hot-spot' meetings.

38. Children who experience or are vulnerable to child sexual exploitation receive a good service from the council. The NSCB and child sexual exploitation Cross-Authority Group provide strategic oversight and promote awareness across the county and Nottingham City, and reports are presented to the Safer Nottinghamshire Board. Four missing children events organised for 2014–15 have been held and have been well attended. Staff from all partner agencies have access to NSCB training including sexual health and e-learning on the risk of sexual exploitation, which has been promoted well, and inspectors saw responsive and well-informed work. Social workers make frequent use of the recently introduced version of the child sexual exploitation risk assessment tool, which helps them to assess the potential vulnerability to child sexual exploitation of individual children. Staff have easy access to advice and consultation from the specialist child sexual exploitation co-ordinator, who is an experienced child protection conference chair. The threshold for access to a multi-agency strategy meeting, chaired by the co-ordinator, is deliberately low, which enables agencies to share information and work together effectively. The number of child sexual exploitation strategy meetings has increased from 105 in 2013–14 relating to 49 children to 136 in 2014–15 relating to 82 children. This is as a result of effective awareness-raising and training delivered to 700 staff face-to face and more than 1,000 participants, including parents, via the NSCB on-line learning.
39. Assessment and planning in these cases are effective and thorough. Parents are invited to strategy meetings unless there are specific reasons for excluding them. Information from the police, social care, schools and other relevant agencies is shared about the young person and the known risks and concerns. They consider the need for disruption activity to deter and prosecute perpetrators. Young people can be referred to the specialist support worker employed to work with this specific group or to other agencies for individual support and direct work. However, information about the impact of this work is limited and is not subject to analysis to help agencies to plan the future development of the service.
40. Partnership arrangements, enthusiasm and drive to improve the attendance of children at school are strong. Swift action is taken to make sure children are not missing from education. Managers identify effectively the levels of risk of all children who are missing from education through tight monitoring processes which include a weekly evaluation of all absentee cases and daily electronic monitoring of those children in alternative provision. They are currently tackling rigorously 38 children they have identified as being most at risk of missing education. For the rest, 191 have an appropriate education plan in place and their attendance is being monitored closely and a further 138 children are now receiving education to meet their needs. Staff monitor proactively the 443 children who are educated at home. Almost all parents have received a visit or submitted a report about the education and welfare of their children so far this year.

41. The local authority has significantly reduced the time it takes to place a child in a school. Managers now place a child in education within 27 days, a significant improvement on the 94 days it used to take. Leaders are bringing together the range of available data they use which will give them an even better oversight of the attendance at schools.
42. A protocol with housing is in place in relation to 16 and 17 year old young people who become homeless. Attempts are made to help the young person to return to the care of their family. Where young people cannot return home, consideration is given to their vulnerability in deciding upon the appropriateness of foster care. Residential care, non-local authority accommodation and supported housing are other options available. Bed and breakfast is not used unless all other options have been exhausted, and only for one or two nights; the accommodation is risk assessed and the consent of a senior manager is needed. No young person was placed in bed and breakfast at the time of this inspection.
43. The service children and young people receive out of hours is good. The service is provided by a sufficient number of experienced social workers and managers, who work from a permanent base and have access to the council's information systems and children's files. Practice is aligned with the rest of the service through regular training, team meetings and development days and information is passed reliably between this part of the service and other teams. A duty group manager system ensures that staff have access to senior management when needed.
44. The council participates fully in the effective Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and MARAC notes relevant to known individual children are copied onto the child's social care file. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings are well attended by the council's managers, which means that there is effective joint working and planning in respect of the risks considered at these meetings.
45. Arrangements for the management of allegations against adults working or volunteering with children are well organised and responsive. Allegations are handled by a small team comprising an allegations officer, a specialist officer for dealing with cases from education settings, and dedicated staff to deal with children missing from home and cases of suspected child sexual exploitation. Individual cases are managed and planned well, with timely and effective work carried out to ensure risks to individual children are assessed and addressed, as well as investigation of the adults concerned.
46. Awareness-raising about private fostering has not had an impact on increasing the number of children and young people known to the council as living in private fostering arrangements. Currently 14 children and young people are known to be privately fostered. The response to these arrangements was variable with some examples seen by inspectors where assessments were

delayed by a number of months. This means some children have been left in situations where risks have been unassessed.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

Summary

Services for looked after children have improved since the last inspection and children and young people now enter care when they need to. Looked after children and young people benefit from positive relationships with their social workers. Their wishes and feelings contribute to their individual care plans and broader service development. Sound social work practice is evident, exemplified by assessments that are mostly of a good quality.

Families on the edge of care are well supported. When children cannot remain with their birth families, court processes supported by legal planning meetings and the Public Law Outline (PLO) are effective and timely.

The vast majority of looked after children and young people live with families in good quality placements within 20 miles of their homes. Most live in stable placements and are cared for by skilled foster carers. Children with complex needs are supported by the work of bespoke Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for looked after children.

Looked after children are making good progress at school, attendance is good and performance at most key stages is improving.

Independent reviewing officers (IROs) demonstrate appropriate rigour and challenge to care planning. A high proportion of children take part in their reviews and the increased visiting of children and young people by IROs between statutory reviews is a commendable development.

Arrangements to track children missing education and those who go missing from care are robust. Effective multi-agency planning reduces risk for most children and young people. Children looked after are routinely offered an interview when they return from a missing episode.

High priority is given to children achieving permanence through adoption. Recruitment, training and post adoption support are all areas of considerable strength.

More needs to be done to ensure that looked after children's health needs are promptly assessed and met in a timely way.

Services for care leavers have not developed at the same pace as others within the council and are not yet good. The health needs of care leavers are not fully addressed and too many pathway plans lack specific actions and timescales. More needs to be done to secure suitable accommodation for all care leavers.

47. Services for looked after children have improved since the last inspection. Since 2008, the rate of looked after children has increased faster than anywhere else in the country. Despite this rapid increase, Nottinghamshire continues to have fewer children in care than its statistical neighbours or the national average. However numbers are predicted to rise further. The number of looked after children has risen from 675 in 2011 to 850 as of March 2015. This rise is due to the effective work of the council and its partners in responding to a history of poor social work decisions that resulted in children remaining for too long in abusive family situations.
48. Good work takes place with children and young people on the edge of care. A nominated senior manager reviews their needs and ensures that effective work takes place with the young person and their family to prevent children from entering care unnecessarily. Decisions that children should be cared for are made at an appropriately senior level, supported by legal advice. Such decisions are evidence based and timely. Inspectors saw no cases where children had entered care inappropriately. All legal planning meetings are chaired by the same senior manager to achieve consistency in the application of thresholds. This also ensures that all other options for children are thoroughly explored at an early point.
49. A small number of looked after children and young people return to live with their families on a planned basis. Where this is the case, re-unification is well planned and underpinned by assessment and the identification of sustained and appropriate support. This may include 'theraplay', undertaken by fostering support workers. In cases seen, decisions for children to return home were based on realistic assessments of risk and parenting capacity. A small number of older looked after children and young people have returned home in an unplanned way. When this happens, social workers are pro-active in providing ongoing monitoring and support. It is usual for the young person's care placement to be held open while stability is sought.
50. The Public Law Outline (PLO) is used well to ensure that timely decisions are made for children and young people to keep them safe. Parents are helped to understand what they need to do to change and the potential consequences if they do not. PLO meetings observed by inspectors were conducted well and were appropriately child centred. Family group conferences are used at times to consider alternative options for children, but they are not used as a matter of routine.
51. Effective strategic and operational work with the courts and Cafcass result in good and timely performance. The average length of time it takes to conclude care proceedings was 27 weeks during 2014–15; this is an improving figure and is better than that of statistical neighbours (29 weeks) and the England average (30 weeks). The local judiciary confirmed that the move towards electronic case bundles and the improved quality of court reports are helping to improve the

timeliness of court proceedings. This demonstrates good performance in reducing delay for children. Assessments and reports prepared by social workers for proceedings are of a high standard overall. All cases benefit from legal oversight in their preparation.

52. Social workers visit children and young people regularly and see them alone. They know and understand the needs of children and young people well and demonstrate warmth and commitment to them. There are many examples of social work interventions with looked after children that are making a positive difference to improve their outcomes. In the vast majority of cases seen by inspectors, assessments have led to good quality direct work that helps children. The majority of assessments seen were of good quality.
53. The range of in-house fostering resources is appropriate and includes mainstream, short-term and long-term therapeutic services. There has recently been significant investment by the council in securing additional residential provision through the commissioning of a further 24 placements. This demonstrates the council's commitment to use residential care alongside its own provision as a positive choice for some children and young people whose needs are best met in children's homes.
54. There are robust monitoring and reporting arrangements for children missing from care and associated risks including child sexual exploitation. A cross-authority multi-agency group established in April 2014 pro-actively considers children and young people who go missing on a regular basis. The group demonstrates good attendance, discussion and challenge. Agencies work well together to assess and manage risks posed to children and young people. This work is effectively co-ordinated by a Children Missing Officer, underpinned by Safeguarding Board procedures that require multi-agency meetings (MAMs) and strategy discussions.
55. Social workers undertake return interviews in accordance with procedures, and the records are mostly of good quality. Despite increased demand, there is good compliance for completing return interviews; 70% are completed within 72 hours and 81% within 5 days.
56. The health needs of looked after children are not given sufficient priority. While performance in relation to annual health checks for 2013–14 is higher at 90% than the national average of 88%, the percentage of looked after children receiving dental checks is 64%, and 61% for immunisations. These figures are lower than the national averages, which are 84% and 87% respectively.
57. The council use the strengths and difficulties questionnaire to identify the well-being and emotional health of looked after children and young people. However, the current data show completion rates stand at 52%. This poor performance represents a missed opportunity to identify and respond to the emotional needs of looked after children and young people through targeted service provision. The council is aware that the meeting of health needs of the

looked after children population remains a stubborn obstacle that was also identified in previous inspections. Accordingly, a multi-agency action plan has been devised to drive up performance in this area. It is too early to measure impact and improved outcomes.

58. There is a specialist service to looked after children and young people through the CAMHS Looked After Children and Adoption Team. The team is currently working with 319 open cases. Dedicated professionals provide timely support to staff and carers through both consultations and assessment. Based on the most recent January 2015 to April 2015 data the average waiting time for the initial CAMHS consultation with a social worker is 5 weeks. Following the initial CAMHS consultation, young people or foster carers are generally seen within two weeks for treatment or follow up.
59. Young people misusing drugs and alcohol have access to commissioned services to help them reduce risks. Effective action is taken to identify and tackle risks associated with offending. There is a good overview of all those in care who are known to the youth offending service, ensuring that suitable support and diversionary activities are in place for each individual young person. This contributes to offending rates of 11%, which are lower than national averages.
60. The council is playing a critical role in improving the educational outcomes for looked after children in the community it serves. Staff plan and monitor looked after children's progress and emotional development carefully, which they record well in personal education plans (PEPs). They are working particularly effectively with leaders and managers in schools to ensure that an increasing number of these children make good progress and achieve. They have a good grip on attendance at schools county-wide. Attendance rates, which have improved over the last few years, were in line with national rates in 2013 and have improved again in 2014/15. Absence rates for looked after children have decreased over the last few years, despite increasing numbers of looked after children. For example, in 2012/13 the overall absence rate was 4.4%; a year later it was 3.7%.
61. The latest virtual school data indicate the proportion of looked after children in primary schools making at least the expected progress in reading and mathematics between Key Stages 1 and 2 has significantly improved from 71% to 86% over the last few years. In 2013/14 the attainment of looked after children in reading and mathematics was above average compared to their peers nationally at Key Stages 1 and 2. The proportion that attained well at Key Stage 1 in reading and mathematics was 76%. The proportion that attained well at Key Stage 2 in reading was 69% and in mathematics 63%. The attainment gaps in mathematics and reading between looked after children and all children are reducing. About 67% attain well in their writing at Key Stage 1 and the proportion that make the expected progress is improving, but attainment is below the average for similar children nationally at Key Stage 2.

62. The service managers are relentless in their desire for improvement. Managers of the virtual school use their self-evaluation process well to identify and take resolute action to tackle poorer performance. This, for example, has meant that they are fully aware of the need to improve progress and achievement further, particularly for looked after children at secondary schools between Key Stages 2 and 4. A small proportion of all looked after children in the council take examinations at Key Stage 4. The proportion gaining five GCSEs including English and mathematics is increasing and above the average of their peers nationally, although it is still too low.
63. Senior managers focus well on targeted action to raise attainment. One particularly effective initiative using the pupil premium to raise standards in looked after children's English skills has captured the imagination of the children, carers and teachers. It has helped children who have significant barriers to learning to create, for example, inventive narratives to a sequence of photographs they have taken. The result of unlocking these children's thirst to read and write, with support from carers and teachers, is the improvement they are making in their attainment and the confidence they gain from the pieces of work they complete. Since the project started, data held by the council show 55 out of 56 children at different key stages have made the expected progress in developing their English skills and 35% have made exceedingly good progress.
64. The large majority (78%) of looked after children attend good or better schools and thorough planning with partners ensures the educational and emotional needs of looked after children are met, including for those where a range of alternative provision is the right choice. The council monitors carefully the very small minority (4%) of children who attend inadequate schools to ensure that their needs continue to be met. Managers implement a good range of training events and information sharing with schools on the dangers of, for example, cyber bullying, self-harm, and radicalisation. They monitor closely and take action where incidents arise in schools; further work is required to understand fully the effectiveness of their work.
65. The very large majority (85%) of looked after children go on to further education or training in employment between ages 16-18. However, managers do not analyse this enough or set targets to increase it further. The number of looked after children following apprenticeships or work-based learning is increasing but is still too low. The audits of personal education plans focus well on children's progress and attainment but are less rigorous in assessing the appropriateness of the young person's next steps at the end of Key Stage 4.
66. The local authority and its partners ensure that looked after children and their carers have access to a broad range of social and leisure activities. The achievements of looked after children are celebrated annually.
67. The majority (87%) of looked after children and young people are placed within 20 miles of their own home, with a large majority (75%) of these living with families. The percentage of children placed with in-house carers or with kinship

carers is 64%. Effective work has been undertaken in the last year to reduce the number of children placed in out-of-county residential provision. At the time of inspection three young people had been successfully moved to foster families. The annual 'At a distance' audit in September 2014 highlighted good quality placements being achieved, good identification and management of children at risk of child sexual exploitation, and children making good use of the local community and leisure facilities. Nottinghamshire has a policy of only placing children in good or outstanding provision, so the vast majority of children and young people live in provision that is at least 'good'. These children and young people are well matched, their needs are met and in the majority of cases seen, outcomes are improving.

68. The sufficiency strategy for looked after children has recently been refreshed following evaluation of the range of current services. Targeted recruitment and significant additional financial investment have increased in-house fostering sufficiency, reducing expenditure on external provision. All assessments are concluded within eight months. The authority approved 66 foster households in 2014–15 and terminated the approvals of 26 households, a net gain of 40 households. Nottinghamshire is one of the country's top ten performing councils in respect of the number of foster placements each foster household provides, 1.6 compared with a national average of 1.3.
69. The fostering panel is effective. Feedback is provided to team managers on the quality of social work assessments; currently about 90% are judged by the panel to be of high quality. Panel members have annual appraisals and performance plans, to ensure that their skills continue to develop.
70. Good practical and financial support is available to families when a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is made, including access to support services, for example 'theraplay'. Following a steady increase in SGOs, numbers are stabilising, with 80 SGOs being granted in 2013-14 and 62 in 2014-15. It is common practice for the council to consider applying for a Supervision Order alongside SGOs and Child Arrangements Orders. This practice ensures ongoing social work support to children, young people, families and carers. These children and young people become subject to child in need planning that is reviewed by child protection coordinators. Support plans identify support arrangements for these children. Applications to foster to adopt have increased and there were two applications in progress at the time of the inspection.
71. Foster carers are skilled. They benefit from good continuity of support from their supervising social workers. Such support extends to round-the-clock access to a bespoke fostering helpline. A range of training is in place for foster carers and is delivered both online and through face-to-face workshops and training events. Foster carer training involves delivery by fostered young people, other foster carers, and internal and external training providers. The training delivered by CAMHS in relation to methods of intervention and attachment disorder is reported by foster carers to be particularly helpful.

72. Care plans for looked after children and young people are underpinned by good quality assessments of need. They are regularly re-assessed by social workers to reflect the changing needs of children, to ensure they are met. The majority of care plans consider the diverse needs of children and young people well.
73. Permanence planning is good. In all cases seen by inspectors, it was timely and appropriate. Permanence is considered for all children at the second statutory review. Tracking meetings convened every six weeks are attended by the Court, Permanency and Adoption teams. These meetings discuss all aspects of permanence planning, for example assessing foster carers as adopters and placing children with older siblings who have been adopted. Plans for permanence other than through adoption for children and young people under fifteen years, are subject to scrutiny by the Permanence Panel.
74. Life story work is given appropriate priority. Children are assisted to understand their life history through purposeful direct work. The council has been effective in placing children with their brothers and sisters when it has been assessed to be in their best interests.
75. Placement stability is good. Over the last three years 9% of looked after children placed by Nottinghamshire have experienced three or more placement moves within a year, compared with 11% nationally. Over 72% of looked after children have been in the same placement for two or more years, exceeding the national average of 67%.
76. The number of statutory reviews of looked after children, chaired and completed by independent reviewing officers (IROs) between April 2014 and March 2015 was 2,263; 90.5% were completed within timescales in the year to March 2015. Of the 2,382 children who had a looked after review during 2014–15, 1,904 were at least four years old. Nearly half of these children and young people are recorded as having attended reviews. Of the remainder, 47.3% are recorded as having their views made known to the review. Throughout the year, there were only 62 occasions when it was recorded that a child's views had not been known and able to inform the review. Where views are not evidenced at the review, the IROs subsequently endeavour to gain the views of the young person.
77. IROs bring rigour and challenge to care planning. Recommendations arising from the regular reviews provide a good overview of progress made and action needed, which ensures that drift is avoided in most cases. An effective escalation process is in place and is used well to help inform service development and social work practice.
78. Looked after children are well represented by a vibrant and dedicated children in care council called 'No Labels'. This is well structured, with three groups comprising different age bands of young people from diverse backgrounds. The young people are rightly proud of the wide range and high quality of materials that they have produced to inform others of what they do, including the Pledge.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good

79. Nottinghamshire has secured adoption for a significantly increased percentage of looked after children annually over the last three years. Between 2011-14, 17% of looked after children in Nottinghamshire left care through adoption, proportionately greater than in other councils. Council figures show that in 2014-15, 84 children were placed for adoption and 92 were adopted. This compares with 51 and 42 respectively in 2011-12.
80. Improved adoption performance has resulted from a concerted strategy to improve the range of appropriate permanence options for all looked after children who need them. The numbers of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) have also increased from 55 in the two year period 2011-13 to 134 during 2013-2015. At March 2014, this comprised 19% of all looked after children. More looked after children are being placed with their extended family or friends under fostering regulations, 31 children are permanently placed and 35 are looked after by their family or friends subject to temporary approval as foster carers. The Court, Permanence and Adoption teams work closely together to commence parallel planning at the earliest stage of care proceedings.
81. Nottinghamshire local figures show that the council achieves adoption for 11% of its black and minority ethnic looked after children, which is in proportion to their representation in the looked after population. This indicator also compares favourably with similar councils. A slightly higher number of older children, aged 5 to 11 years, are adopted in the county than in other authorities. In 2013-14, 31 of 90 children adopted during that year were aged between five and 11 years. The council also has a strong record in adoptions of brothers and sisters. Of 67 children adopted between April to December 2014, 60% were part of a sibling group. In 2013-14, 15 family groups of brothers and sisters were placed together, and none was separated, which is commendable. This information indicates that Nottinghamshire is highly effective in achieving adoption for children who are typically more difficult to place. This is in addition to the increased range of other permanent outcomes secured for their looked after children.
82. Nottinghamshire placed children with their adoptive families an average of 606 days from the point they entered care during 2011-14. This is better than the national average of 628 days, although below the Department for Education target. The average time in 2014 was shorter than the previous year. However, the council took significantly longer, at 254 days, during the period 2011-2014 to match children with adopters from the point court authority was obtained than other councils. Over the last two years the number of days has increased,

indicating that an improving trend is not yet evident. In the last year, the average time from placement order to matching was 324 days.

83. Children who wait longer to be matched are typically those with severe disabilities, behavioural difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, and older children. Cases sampled during the inspection indicated that extensive family finding was undertaken over a protracted time period, of two to three years in some cases. While the reasons for delays in family finding are recognised, this does leave some children in uncertain situations for too long, despite the council's tenacity in ongoing family finding efforts.
84. Adopter recruitment has markedly increased over the last three years and there are currently 56 approved adopters awaiting a match, with 27 children waiting. This demonstrates efficient sufficiency planning in the recruitment of adopters. There are, on average, six new enquiries, six approvals and six children placed each month.
85. There are three adoption panels each month, enabling all prospective adopter approvals and matches to be scrutinised without delay. The panels have a diverse membership with longstanding independent chairs. Panel members receive regular training and annual appraisals. Panels are efficiently administered and managed with extensive minutes chronicling careful probing and analysis of social work assessments. Placement breakdowns are extremely low in number, indicating that panel quality assurance is an important component in planning careful, enduring matches.
86. There were 34 children waiting for matching at the point of the inspection. Seven of these did not have a Placement Order, so home finding activities were duly limited. Potential links had been identified for 27 children, ranging from early phases of report exchange, through to advanced preparations for panel. Five children had a panel date booked during the month the inspection was held. One child was unborn, with discussions occurring about a foster-to-adopt placement.
87. Enquiries from prospective adopters are responded to promptly. Social workers complete the large majority of both stages of the assessment process within timescales. On average Stage 1 of the assessment process is completed in less than two months at 7.1 weeks and Stage 2 marginally outside of the prescribed four months target at an average of 127 days. Where assessments take longer, there are clear reasons, such as adopters taking time out to reflect and contemplate further on their motivation, in some cases seeking counselling to consider unresolved issues emerging from their personal histories.
88. Preparation training is extensive, with prospective adopters required to attend all groups and seminars provided. Additional seminars are offered, for example, on loss, identity and discrimination, play and therapeutic parenting and contact and adoption. Thorough financial assessments are undertaken by two dedicated

welfare rights specialists to ensure all benefits and tax credits are understood and used.

89. Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs) and Child Permanency Reports (CPRs) are thorough and rigorous. PARs seen during the inspection featured well-considered reflection and analysis of adult profiles and histories with evidence of pertinent challenge and probing by both authors and panel members. Twenty five adopters seen during the inspection spoke highly of the support, professionalism and skill of social workers during their assessments. Children's family histories and individual profiles were skilfully reported in CPRs, providing prospective adopters and panel members with rich content on which to consider matches. Panel Chairs reported that the large majority of social work reports are of a good quality.
90. Home finding activities are both extensive and effective, making use of the East Midlands consortium, Adoption Register, Adoption Link and local profiling and activity days. All children waiting are reviewed each month. Home finding files demonstrate thorough, imaginative and interesting profiles of children. Importance is paid to producing high quality, sensitive and well-illustrated life story books. Direct work undertaken with children in the preparation phase by their social workers is skilled and of a consistently high quality. Adopter profiles are prepared and disseminated during the second stage of their PAR assessments to minimize delay and increase the volume of potential matches.
91. Nottinghamshire has a comprehensive service providing support after adoption. Council figures show that the service is currently engaging with 115 adults and 117 children. The support offer includes a commissioned birth parents counselling service. An online resource bank provides links to a wide range of articles, resources and books for adopters. An informative range of seminars and workshops is offered each year for adopters to both meet and learn about important themes such as the impact of foetal alcohol syndrome.
92. Family support workers are trained in 'theraplay' and dyadic developmental psychotherapy to help adopters understand attachment and develop strong attachments with their children, particularly in the earlier phases of adoption. Some adopted children are supported by sessional workers who undertake regular confidence building activities with them. Nottinghamshire's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides a dedicated, specialist service for looked after and adopted children. CAMHS also provide consultations to social workers and adopters. There are 319 open cases in CAMHS of looked after and adopted children. The average duration of treatment programmes is 58 weeks.
93. Adopters reported to inspectors that they can readily access effective adoption support at any stage of childhood, receiving consistent, prompt responses. The 25 adopters spoken to during the inspection particularly valued the skilled advice and support received about issues concerning contact with birth family

members, arising both in the early post placement phase through to their children's teenage and early adult years.

94. The virtual school is available to provide support to adopted children. The pupil premium is used for children with additional educational needs to provide further support in schools. Adopters are offered support when their children approach secondary school transfer, to assist them through the transition period.
95. Over the last 12 months, 14 (15%) of children where adoption was being considered have had plans changed; this illustrates an improving trend from previous years. Cases seen by inspectors show that reasons for changed plans were predominantly justifiable including examples where foster carers had formed enduring attachments and wished to foster the children permanently. The children concerned expressed clear wishes not to be moved. A further example featured a birth mother who successfully applied for revocation of a placement order, having separated from a partner who was the primary source of safeguarding concerns, and the child returned to her care under a supervision order.
96. Fostering to adopt is considered in all prospective adopter assessments and there are four such placements currently. Clear guidance is available to both adopters and potential adopters. Recent fostering-to-adopt cases involve babies where the birth mothers' older children have been removed, and younger children in proceedings whose older siblings are already members of an adoptive family. Concurrent planning occurs during care proceedings where the council position is not to consider rehabilitation but the court has not yet confirmed an adoption plan. Liaison is ongoing with the Family Proceedings Court and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service to further their understanding and support of the scheme. The programme is targeted at adopters with the level of emotional resilience necessary to manage uncertainty and potential loss.

The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it requires improvement

97. Services for care leavers have been slower to develop than those for other children and young people, as services for safeguarding have received a higher priority. Only recently have care leavers been included in a looked after children and care leavers' strategy, and this indicates that there has been a lack of attention to their needs. An increasing population of looked after children and care leavers means improved planning and a wider range of resources need to be in place to meet the demands of young people leaving care.

98. Nevertheless, the care leaving service has a stable and experienced staff group who are passionate about their work and know the care leavers well. The council reports that they are in touch with 86% of care leavers. Case records show that personal advisers make efforts to locate those not in contact. All care leavers who spoke to inspectors talked of the valued relationship they have with their personal advisers. They all said they feel safe where they live and in the knowledge that their personal adviser is available and there to help. Care leavers talked about their personal advisers being “only a phone call away” and “amazing”.
99. Case records show that personal advisers help care leavers to look at risks and life choices. Examples seen included personal advisers working with a care leaver to consider how his behaviour, though innocent, could be construed as threatening to others he lived with. In another case involving risks of domestic abuse, a personal adviser worked with a young person and other agencies to develop a safety strategy. All pathway plans include details and contact numbers of agencies who can offer support, and care leaving teams have a range of helpful leaflets and information for care leavers.
100. Independence skills are developed using the “Get Ready For Adult Life” work book and DVD. Evidence was seen of personal advisers working with young people on budgeting, relationships, use of public transport and spending of the home establishment grant. Some personal advisers are trained in a scheme to provide young people with condoms and the Family Nurse Partnership has worked with care leavers who are pregnant or parents to assist with parenting skills. Care leavers have talked of the confidence they have gained from working with personal advisers who have assisted them to prepare for job interviews. The care leaving service has provided financial support to care leavers for a wide range of needs including higher education, maintaining contact with family and friends and help with the costs of obtaining a heavy goods vehicle licence.
101. The council does not have a detailed understanding of the health needs of care leavers. The Children’s Integrated Commissioning Hub, formed in July 2014, has an action plan to undertake an audit of health needs including substance misuse and teenage pregnancy but this work has not been completed to date. This means that the council is unaware of care leavers’ health needs, the resources that are needed and where these should be targeted.
102. Care leavers do not have information about their health histories in the form of a letter or health passport. A new health information pack is being piloted for young people approaching their 18th birthday. However, the current group of care leavers do not have this information and there are no plans to ensure that it is made available to them. This means that they will not know their full health histories when seeking treatment in the future.
103. Personal advisers acknowledge the challenge for care leavers accessing adult services. The Looked After Children Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service,

which provides valuable consultation and direct work for looked after children, ceases when they reach the age of 18. Where emotional and mental health needs are recognised by personal advisers they have few options to support care leavers other than suggesting a GP referral. The council assists with financial support for therapeutic help in some cases but this does not meet the needs of the majority. Where care leavers with disabilities have met thresholds for adult services, inspectors saw examples of good transition planning. Social workers have been allocated, along with psychology services and support packages, including respite.

104. Pathway plans are not specific enough about actions and timescales for change. Plans describe care leavers' histories and circumstances well, with their views clearly expressed, yet the actions recorded are not sufficiently clear. Personal advisers encourage and support care leavers to take initiative and responsibility for themselves but do not set out what they will do to help them. Timescales are often set as the next review date, which means that the plan is not a working document. In some cases seen there was a lack of follow-up work described in case notes and it was not possible to see if important areas such as mental health needs were being addressed.
105. Pathway plans are not independently reviewed, which means that decisions lack scrutiny and challenge. Managers use a tracking system to ensure that plans are completed within timescales. There are 347 open cases in the care leaving service of which 38 are still open to the looked after children's teams as the young person is aged between 17.5 years and 18 years. The council's tracking system showed that 33 plans (10.6%) out of 309 had not been reviewed within timescales, though there was some uncertainty about this figure, which suggests that management information is not always reliable.
106. The council has recognised that more needs to be done to meet the accommodation needs of care leavers to provide choice and emergency provision. If they become homeless, care leavers have to apply to district councils as homeless, consider private rented accommodation or rely on family or friends. The council has developed a commissioning strategy "Supporting Young People (16-21) to Live Independently". This is due to be implemented in September 2015 and aims to provide services for homeless young people and care leavers, including emergency provision.
107. Council information shows that 82% of its care leavers are in suitable accommodation, which is higher than statistical neighbours at 74% and the England average of 78% as at 31 March 2014. The council has 199 units of accommodation, offering varying levels of support. There are specialised units in three districts catering for teenagers who are pregnant or parents, and a 12 bedded unit is available for care leavers who are disabled, with 24 hour support. Bed and breakfast accommodation is used rarely and only as a last resort and for a limited period. Of 70 houses in multi-occupation, 64 are deemed suitable and risk assessments are completed prior to a young person moving in. There has been sensitive work undertaken with asylum seekers

about their accommodation preferences. Some groups of asylum seekers choose to share accommodation, which provides a good support network.

108. Staying Put numbers have risen from 19 in September 2014 to the current figure of 31. These arrangements are made with both Nottinghamshire's and independent agency foster carers. This demonstrates the council's commitment to the stability of placements for care leavers. One asylum seeker spoke about his foster carers being like his own family, supporting his cultural needs with the purchase of halal meat and attending the mosque, and could not thank them enough.
109. A peer evaluation of Nottinghamshire's leaving care service was conducted by a large national charity in January 2015 and noted a lack of understanding of health needs and challenges in the provision of accommodation. It also recognised the limited involvement of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and the subsequent lack of drive from this group to work with partners to ensure improvements are made. The lack of strategic oversight is also reflected in the fact that the council does not hold management information on care leavers who are missing, at risk of sexual exploitation, substance misusers or offenders. Individual cases are known and worked on but there is a lack of understanding of the needs of the group as a whole and how resources should be targeted. The council is now responding to the findings from this external audit. It has strengthened the corporate parenting panel with additional personnel to provide greater rigour and challenge, to ensure that services improve at a much faster rate. It is too early to see the impact of this.
110. In 2013–14, 38% of care leavers aged 19–21 years were not in education, training or employment. This is slightly better than statistical neighbours at 41% and the same as the England average. However, the proportion not in education, training or employment has been increasing in the last few years and it is still too high. Robust plans are in place and include increasing the number of apprenticeship courses available.
111. About half of care leavers go on to further and higher education, training, or employment. This is above statistical neighbours at 40% and the England average of 45%. Of these, five (3%) went on to higher education, which is below comparators at 6%, 55 went on to further education and 55 went into training or employment. While this is better than the average for councils nationally, and the proportion has been increasing in the last few years, it is still too low.
112. Personal advisers and 18+ achievement advisers encourage care leavers to access learning. The council was awarded the Care2Work quality mark in 2015 for work in supporting young people with education, employment and training. Care leavers cite their educational experiences in vocational education and the development of English and mathematics as being important stepping stones to them moving forward in their lives. Targets in plans seen by inspectors have not been sufficiently clear and several care leavers have moved between

different education and career pathways. Not enough are sufficiently well advised about the right future learning opportunities at the point of leaving care.

113. Participation events are set up for care leavers, providing them with relevant information along with opportunities to mix with staff and peers. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors were positive about such events, which have recently focused on domestic violence, refugee services and financial support.
114. None of the care leavers spoken with had heard about the Pledge to Looked After Children and Young People, which shows that it is not a meaningful document for them. Some care leavers have been involved in staff interviews and service development but not all care leavers are engaged with the development of the service. Staff recognise this as an area for development and a newsletter for care leavers is being produced. There is a range of documents available to care leavers covering their entitlements, employment, financial support and complaints. These are provided when care leavers need information. Care leavers are aware of how to complain and details are set out in pathway plans.

Leadership, management and governance

Good

Summary

Since its transformation programme began in May 2011, the council has taken authoritative action to invest in and redesign services for children and young people. This has led to services being judged as good at this inspection, with the exception of the care leaving service which has been found to require improvement. This means that the most vulnerable children and young people in Nottinghamshire are likely to receive the help they need and are safer as a result.

Effective governance arrangements are in place. Political and professional leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and encourage robust challenge and oversight to support improvement in most aspects of service provision. Where services are not as strong, for example services for care leavers and children living in private fostering arrangements, plans are now in place to improve practice. A recent external review of the care leaving service, conducted by a large national charity in January 2015, identified many of the shortfalls highlighted in this inspection. Senior leaders accept they need to continue to focus on making improvements to this service. They recognise there is more to do to ensure that practice is consistently good across all services.

Clear lines of accountability and a strong culture of performance management have led to improved practice and experiences for children and young people and their families. Senior leaders and elected members are visible and active in quality assurance activity, including audit and shadowing practitioners. Management oversight of practice is embedded and social workers receive regular supervision. A strong focus on listening to practitioners about the pressures they face in their day to day work has led to initiatives to improve their working environment and contributes to high morale.

Until recently the corporate parenting panel had not had sufficient oversight of services for care leavers, but changes have been made to ensure greater scrutiny and impact as services develop. Good commissioning arrangements are in place, with, for example, renewed focus on ensuring child mental health services are equipped to meet the growing demand for complex and multiple health care needs.

Effective workforce planning has been underpinned by improvements to the working environment, the introduction of practice consultants, enhanced business support and better caseload management.

Inspection findings

115. Following the unannounced inspection by Ofsted in 2009, which revealed significant weaknesses in service delivery, and the inspection of safeguarding and arrangements for looked after children in March 2010, which found overall effectiveness for safeguarding to be inadequate, swift and decisive action was taken by the council to tackle the deficits. An unannounced inspection in February 2011 concluded that there had been considerable progress made, with a further inspection in September 2011 finding services to be adequate. A stable and consistent senior leadership team has provided vision and drive to improving services and outcomes for children and young people. Investment of £35 million over five years supported the redesign of the service and increased the social work establishment.
116. The senior leadership team, including the Chief Executive, the Interim Director of Children's Services and elected members, have detailed knowledge and understanding of the experiences of children and young people in Nottinghamshire. This is underpinned by regular reviews of data and a quality assurance process that involves senior managers and elected members in auditing, shadowing practitioners and visiting services.
117. Relationships between the Chief Executive and the chair of the LSCB are strong and are supported by regular meetings which include the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, the children's social care lead member and the principal social worker. This is an effective forum for challenge and debate, informed by elected members' direct knowledge of services and the principal social worker's dialogue with frontline practitioners.
118. Governance arrangements are strong. The Children's Trust is a commissioning sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The board maintains a focus on children's issues, with regular agenda items relating to children and young people.
119. The council is responsive to children and young people who may be at risk of sexual exploitation. A strategy involving partners within the council and neighbouring authorities underpins this work. Extensive awareness training has been completed for staff including bespoke events for elected members, head teachers and school governors.
120. The council and its partners recognise the risks to children and young people who go missing and the increased risk of sexual exploitation. Systems are in place where a young person is reported absent or missing to ensure vulnerability to sexual exploitation is considered in assessing the risk they may face. The appointment of a dedicated 'missing' co-ordinator by the council provides a point of contact for external agencies, advice to social workers and is key in identifying patterns and trends. However, the council does not gather and use management information effectively enough with regard to care

leavers who are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation, to enable them to have a better understanding of their needs.

121. A new service currently being commissioned will extend preventive work to younger children in years four and five and will recognise other vulnerabilities such as risks of radicalisation.
122. The quality of practice is improving. Children and young people who need help and protection or need to be looked after are receiving the help they need. Good management oversight is embedded at team manager level. Social workers feel supported by regular supervision that assists in progressing plans and improving outcomes for children and young people. One recently appointed team manager described training on reflective supervision as having improved her practice. However, records of supervision seen by inspectors did not always evidence this. Practice consultants based in social work teams provide research and learning from local and national serious case reviews in addition to providing support to individual workers through mentoring or co-working. Their role is highly valued by practitioners.
123. The council has responded to the challenge of recruitment by focusing its strategy on recruiting newly qualified social workers. Social workers in their first year of practice benefit from the support of a mentor as well as access to practice consultants and their own line manager. Newly qualified social workers spoken to by inspectors were positive about the support they receive. Reliance on agency staff is reducing; current rates at 17%, with an average stay of 284 days, show stability within the agency workforce. Agency staff are used proactively, sometimes in a supernumerary capacity, for example to increase the balance of experienced staff where there is a high number of newly qualified social workers in a team. This ensures an appropriate balance of experience while new practitioners develop their skills and knowledge. As a result of this strategy, 100 newly qualified social workers have moved on to experienced worker status over the last four years.
124. Morale amongst social work practitioners in Nottinghamshire is high. Child protection conference co-ordinators and independent reviewing officers (IROs) consider their role in relation to challenge is acknowledged, welcomed and promoted by senior leaders. Senior managers are accessible and responsive. Thoughtful attention has been given to improving the environment for practitioners. An annual social work health check carried out by the council, a staff survey, staff forums, visits to services and shadowing opportunities are all used by leaders and managers to understand the pressures staff experience. Mobile working, personal safety alarms and additional business support are all initiatives introduced in response to feedback from staff. Social workers value this support and the council's investment in their working environment.
125. Investment in the workforce has resulted in an increase in the number of social workers, child protection conference co-ordinators and IROs. This investment has supported good performance, for example with 99.6% of children subject

to child protection plans having their reviews held in a timely way in 2014–15. IRO caseloads reduced from around 120 two years ago to current caseloads in the low seventies. This has had a direct impact on the ability of IROs to spend time with children and young people. A caseload weighting system is in place and caseloads in social work teams vary. Caseloads seen by inspectors in the court teams ranged between 10 and 12. In assessment and district child protection teams they are higher, with the highest caseload seen by inspectors being 26. All of the social workers spoken to by inspectors described their caseloads as manageable. There was no unallocated work.

126. In addition to a detailed monthly core performance management report, managers have access to a daily data dashboard which supports them in monitoring the timely completion of work, case load numbers and visits to children in timescales, and enables them to spot potential risks and provide additional support to teams where appropriate.
127. The quality assurance framework, which did not exist in 2010, has been developed by senior managers to focus on quality of practice rather than compliance. A culture of auditing has been established with 5% of child in need cases and 5% of child protection cases audited each quarter. Audits are conducted by senior managers and elected members as well as team managers. Improvements in practice have resulted, for example, in the quality of child protection plans graded good or outstanding. In the last three months of 2013–14, 35% of 109 child protection cases audited received a good or better grade, based upon assessed and analysed needs and reflecting the views of children, young people, parents and carers. In the same three months of 2014–15, although with a smaller sample of 31 cases, 70% of child protection plans were graded good or better for their quality. External audits are commissioned to support improvement and validate the quality and rigour of the internal audit process. The council's own audit findings from the cases selected as part of the inspection were generally consistent with the overall findings of inspectors.
128. The council is aware of the shortfalls identified at this inspection in relation to the quality of services to care leavers. Plans are in place to increase the effectiveness of this service but these were not fully embedded in practice at the time of this inspection. The response by the council to a peer evaluation of its leaving care service, conducted by a large national charity in January 2015, has been uncharacteristically slow for a senior leadership team that has shown such tenacity in all other areas of service delivery.
129. Effective systems are in place for liaison between the council and Cafcass. This has improved the timeliness of proceedings to 27 weeks, reducing delay in achieving permanence for children and young people.
130. Multi-agency work to reduce re-offending has been effective. A recent Short Quality Screening inspection by HMI Probation of Youth Offending work in Nottinghamshire in May 2015 found that work to reduce re-offending, to

protect the public, children and young people, and to ensure sentences are served was of a good quality. The inspection found the performance of the Youth Justice Service to be very creditable.

131. In contrast, a recent inspection in September 2014 of police child protection arrangements in Nottinghamshire by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) found some areas of weakness similar to those identified during this inspection; in particular, the police attendance at and contribution to initial child protection conferences, information sharing and children not being seen and spoken to when responding to domestic violence referrals. Since the inspection the council both through the senior leadership team, elected members and the Local Safeguarding Children Board have been engaging in conversation with senior officers in the police force to support improvement in these areas. An action plan and an action log are used to update members on the progress made.
132. Commissioning is informed by a comprehensive joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) which gives appropriate attention to children and young people's requirements. Commissioning arrangements are responsive to need and emerging issues. Arrangements are aligned with the sufficiency strategy and the council has been successful in increasing the pool of in-house foster carers. A contract to provide a block purchase of 24 beds was awarded to two external providers in April 2015. This will provide increased opportunities for children and young people to remain in or return to Nottinghamshire when it is their best interests to do so. It is intended to reduce the overall average cost of residential care while sustaining quality.
133. The Integrated Commissioning Hub, established in 2013, has undertaken a review of a number of services including health services for children and young people with complex or multiple health needs and CAMHS. A £2million pound investment has been secured from the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to redesign and improve CAMHS. This will increase capacity and include a crisis intervention team which is not available currently. The Integrated Children and Young People Healthcare Programme will streamline health services for children and young people, bringing together a range of 15 services. The contract is currently out to tender and is expected to take effect in April 2016.
134. The corporate parenting panel is active. However, it has not been sufficiently effective in monitoring and improving the health care needs of looked after children. It has also not provided sufficient scrutiny with regard to the care leaving service. The panel has recently been expanded to include an IRO and team manager from the care leaving service to ensure greater scrutiny and impact in driving forward the improvements required.
135. Children and young people are effectively involved in influencing and shaping services in Nottinghamshire. Their views and life experiences are used well. They are routinely incorporated into themed audits, with practice consultants visiting children and young people to gather their views. In addition to

contributing to the audit process, children are given the opportunity to send a 'Message in a Bottle' to the head of service. All of the children receive a personal response to their messages.

136. Young Pioneers, a group of young people with additional needs, are an active and vibrant group engaged in a range of activities, consultations and campaigns. They have produced an anti-bullying DVD and contributed to the design of the Integrated Community Children and Young People's Healthcare Programme. Currently the Young Pioneers are working on a campaign on improving public transport for young disabled people. The Children in Care Council, 'No Labels', is dynamic and is involved in a range of activities and consultations that have had a direct impact on services such as the standard of children's homes and helping to train foster carers so that they are better prepared and understand the needs of looked after children.
137. The council has taken a creative approach to identifying and adopting practice which is evidence based. The Knowledge Transfer partnership established with Nottingham Trent University identified the Family Nurse Partnership as an effective parenting programme. Funding from the council and NHS England was used to extend the scheme by a further 200 places. A literature review of the effectiveness of theoretical approaches to working with children and families is underpinning the development of the single assessment in Nottinghamshire and the evidenced based multi-modality literacy project has had a direct and striking impact on looked after children's achievement in reading and writing. Inspectors saw evidence of learning from serious case reviews, for example through individual discussion with social workers, and in innovations such as the Think Family model used by GPs in Bassetlaw. This entails weekly meetings to share information and consider risk in relation to vulnerable children whose parents are involved with adult services.
138. Nottinghamshire has a thorough and robust process for learning from complaints. Most complaints are resolved quickly with only nine (3.3%) of 266 complaints received in 2014–15 progressing beyond stage one. Themes are identified at quarterly meetings; this has led to the revision of processes and procedures such as the issuing of clearer guidance on procedures to manage induced or fabricated illness, which has had a positive impact on practice.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

The arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and Board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children are good.

An LSCB that is **good** coordinates the activity of statutory partners and monitors the effectiveness of local arrangements. Multi-agency training in the protection and care of children is effective and evaluated regularly for impact. The LSCB provides robust and rigorous evaluation and analysis of local performance that identifies areas for improvement and influences the planning and delivery of high-quality services.

Executive summary

The Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) is effectively chaired and well managed and has enabled positive co-operative relationships between partner agencies. It fulfils all of its statutory responsibilities and facilitates strong multi-agency co-operation.

Partners hold each other to account well and keep safeguarding at the centre of the work of the Board. Escalation processes are used effectively when necessary. There is a clear, succinct business plan, updated as emerging priorities arise, which holds board members to account, and a Learning and Development Framework that supports the agreed expectations of partners.

The Board has a strong multi-agency audit process and ensures improvement is monitored through repeat audit in priority areas. There is a strong learning and development programme linked to national and local issues, and learning from serious case reviews is embedded in this programme.

The Board ensures that children's experiences are at the centre of its work, including children placed away from the council, and children from other councils placed in Nottinghamshire.

The Board is aware of areas in which it needs to develop, for example with regard to influencing involvement in multi-agency strategy discussions, updating the Communication and Engagement Strategy, and ensuring the effectiveness of private fostering arrangements. The current data set primarily focuses on children's social care, which means that data and information on safeguarding by other agencies are not fully considered.

Recommendations

139. Ensure that the NSCB continues to influence appropriate partner input from relevant agencies, such as the police in child protection conferences. (Paragraph 145)
140. Update the Communication and Engagement strategy and increase front line practitioner awareness of the work of the Board. (Paragraph 154)
141. Ensure that effective action is taken to meet the needs of children who are privately fostered. (Paragraph 164)
142. Revise and refresh the Board's data set to ensure a wider focus on the performance of partner agencies. (Paragraph 155)

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

143. Governance arrangements for the NSCB are good. The Board complies with its statutory and regulatory responsibilities, assisted by a regularly updated self-assessment tool. Board members are of sufficient seniority within their own organisation to have influence and effect change.
144. Attendance at meetings is good. All sub-group chairs are members of the Board and the Executive group is chaired by the Board's vice chair. Sub-groups are effective and an escalation process is in operation for any issues that cannot be resolved within these groups.
145. The Board is effectively chaired and well organised, and is described by partners as having 'a bit of life to it'. It offers a safe environment to hold partners to account and challenge as necessary. Partners who spoke to inspectors felt that the structure and grip of the Board meant that the safeguarding focus stayed strong in Nottinghamshire regardless of any external organisational changes. It was described as a Board that has matured and where members can have difficult conversations; it was defined as owning the safeguarding agenda across the partnership. Recent challenging conversations at a strategic level have included the lack of police attendance at child protection conferences and the health care needs of looked after children.
146. The Chair of the Board has facilitated a culture of openness and challenge. Partner agencies spoken with described the Board as giving equal consideration and respect to all partners while remaining clearly focused on the overall priorities of the work of the Board. The Board has two lay members who participate in site visits to frontline services along with other Board members. This has included meeting directly with young people and shadowing front line practitioners. The role of the lay members is clear and they offer a challenging voice to the Board on behalf of children and the public.

147. Sub-groups are well chaired by senior representatives from different partner agencies across social care, education and health, with the police chairing the child sexual exploitation cross-agency sub-group. This assists in providing a multi-agency perspective across the range of Board functions. The Board is financially well managed, with long-established multi-agency funding arrangements.
148. The 2011 Ofsted inspection indicated the Board was well placed to make progress and the evidence shows that this has been fulfilled. An independent review of the Board in 2013 recognised the continued progress. The Board has continued to make significant progress while also identifying areas for further improvement. Recent specific improvements include an increased focus on early help, a higher profile for safeguarding in education and the appointment to vacant posts of the training coordinator in 2014 and a development manager (child deaths) in February 2015.
149. The NSCB's Learning and Improvement Framework supports agencies holding each other to account. Recent discussions at the full board have included the use of adult wards for the treatment of young people with mental health issues, and children detained in police cells under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. Progress is monitored via a comprehensive action plan that includes timescales for review.
150. The Board has good links and relationships with other strategic groups and communication networks including the Missing Children's group, the Think Family group, the health forum, the safeguarding and education forum, the cross-authority group looking at female genital mutilation and the Young People's Board. The Board worked with the Young People's Board to commission a film to reduce the number of road traffic accidents. This was disseminated across the partnership, including schools, and lesson plans are being developed. The film was also shown at the first national Child Death Overview Panel Conference in December 2014.
151. There are effective links with the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Children's Trust, Nottinghamshire's Adults Safeguarding Board and Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board. This has assisted on issues such as tackling child sexual exploitation, and a cross-authority multi-agency child sexual exploitation strategy and work plan for 2015–16 support this. The Chair of the safeguarding board sits on the Children's Trust, and leads two priority areas of the Children and Young People's Plan, one of which is child sexual exploitation. The current multi-agency audit focusing on mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse is an effective example of a joint piece of work across the Adults and Children's Boards within Nottinghamshire.
152. There are clear and effective lines of communication and accountability between the council Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Board. This is supported by regular minuted meetings between the Chief Executive, the Chair, the Principal Social Worker and elected members.

The Chair meets quarterly with the Director of Children's Services prior to a main Board meeting to discuss the agenda, performance and scrutiny issues. The Chief Executive takes priority issues from the Board to broader areas of influence and a piece of work has recently been commissioned on taxi licensing and fast food outlets as part of the child sexual exploitation action plan.

153. The Board has a clear business plan for 2014–2016, which has been recently updated to include emerging priorities such as reviewing thresholds and refreshing inter-agency guidance in relation to neglect, and scrutiny of CAMHS provision including the implementation of a review of CAMHS. Both actions are led by the Chair of the safeguarding board with a neglect threshold exercise arranged for June 2015 and a report on progress regarding CAMHS being presented to the Board in September 2015.
154. Every action in the business plan is allocated to a named senior manager. An associated action plan is used to monitor and evaluate progress against priority areas of work using a colour coded system. All but one of the actions are on target. The only area rated red, where a target has not been met, relates to the need to update the Communication and Engagement Strategy, to ensure that frontline practitioners are increasingly aware of the impact of the board.
155. There are good reporting arrangements and the Board has a clear agreed data set. Performance information is combined with qualitative analysis to help to understand the experiences of children and young people. However, information is primarily focused on children's social care; data and information from other agencies, such as the use of police powers of protection, are not currently considered.
156. The Board oversees multi-agency audit work through the multi-agency audit sub-group. This is an area of strength. Areas of practice requiring auditing are identified through a range of processes such as a serious case review and feedback from front line practitioners. Specific areas of practice that have been audited include the voice of the child, young people's access to services, child sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse, early help work and initial child protection conferences. There is a rolling programme of repeat audits in areas where progress has been made but further work is identified. The process of audit strengthens practice and this is monitored by the Board. A recent example is improvements in initial child protection case conferences (ICPCs) including in relation to timescales and in the participation of young people, an area that had been of concern. A repeat audit on ICPCs is planned for December 2015 to monitor progress and to further improve young people's involvement and contribution.
157. The Board has child sexual exploitation and missing children as priority areas in its business plan. As part of the work being undertaken to address issues relating to child sexual exploitation and children missing from home or care, practice guidance has been revised and re-issued. In January 2015 the Board's Executive group considered questionnaires returned by young people who had

been missing undertaken in response to a survey conducted with the Children in Care Council. Responses were low and more work to be undertaken on return interviews was identified for follow up.

158. The threshold document 'Pathway to Provision' is clear and appropriately used in practice. Board members undertook an interactive exercise on real case studies to test early help thresholds for themselves and have another one planned on thresholds and neglect. The Board regularly updates policies and procedures and ensures they are available on the website. Front line staff have been involved in revisions of policy documents through the Board, resulting in these staff attending impact evaluation events in September 2014 on the new procedures.
159. The Board ensures that section 11 audits are undertaken and these take place every two years. Section 11 audits have high completion rates and the Executive group monitors follow up on areas requiring progress and any non-submissions. Progress reports are requested from any partner agencies where an area of improvement is identified. Education feedback is completed through the complementary process of the Governors Compliance Checklist. Data on child sexual exploitation is now requested as part of this return.
160. Training and development are strong. Significant progress has been made over the last 12 months. A new training coordinator has been appointed and a recently refreshed learning and development sub-group has adopted a more strategic approach and brought a stronger focus on practice development. This led, for example, to police and health bringing Prevent and the radicalisation agenda to the sub-group, and raising awareness across agencies. There is a clear learning pathway, a clear rationale for each course and good follow up and analysis of impact.
161. Training is well attended by partners and the sub-group monitors attendance. The training coordinator is proactive in chasing up low agency attendance. Attendance at multi-agency training in 2014-2015 increased overall, with higher numbers of staff attending from health, police and children's social care. In addition, the take up on unlimited e-learning on child sexual exploitation and awareness of child abuse and neglect has been good with increases of over 80% in the last year. Child sexual exploitation and safeguarding children missing from home or care have been priority areas in the training programme, with extra courses made available when courses became fully booked. Two seminars were offered specifically on raising awareness of the sexual exploitation of boys and young men.
162. Training is having a positive impact on practice. For example, training in September 2014 on fabricated or induced illness has resulted in 15 cases being identified; only one case had previously been recognised.

163. A quality assurance scheme to accredit single agency introductory safeguarding training has recently been introduced, supporting the broader promotion of the awareness of safeguarding.
164. The Board has undertaken work on raising awareness of private fostering arrangements, although members are aware that further work is required both to raise awareness and to ensure that vulnerable children are protected through robust assessments. For example, the Board has identified that school admissions teams and health partners may be the first to come across such arrangements.
165. Serious case reviews are undertaken appropriately and published, and the Chair is confident in his independent role with regard to decision-making. All decisions by the Chair have been validated by the National Panel of Independent Experts (NPiE). Agencies undertake learning reviews, for example in cases that do not meet the threshold for a serious case review. Learning is then disseminated across the partnership. A recent example is promotion, via the regular NSCB newsletter, of the 'Bruising pathway', which alerts practitioners to the significance of bruising found on non-mobile babies. The serious incident review sub-group receives referrals from all partner agencies and monitors the action plans of serious case reviews. The training coordinator works closely with the serious incident review group to ensure that training courses link specifically to learning from serious case reviews and action plans are monitored through the Board. A recent training programme on child sexual abuse is an example of this. In addition bulletins are sent out to staff with headline lessons and a presentation for managers to use in team meetings, for example.
166. Inclusion of a senior education representative on the Board has extended its influence. A safeguarding in education event for the main Board in December 2014 raised awareness of a number of issues, including female genital mutilation, and a letter was recently sent to all schools about 'sexting' and the link to potential child sexual exploitation.
167. The annual report of the Board is clear and thorough and includes reports from each of the sub groups including the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). It is evaluative and analytical. The report includes quotes from young people, helpful case studies, progress made and areas for future development. The voice of the child is strong throughout, for example, information on the use of 'My Protection Plan' and handwritten messages from young people as part of 'message in a bottle' to the Service Director for Children's Social Care. The report specifically includes action taken in response to the Voice of the Child audit.

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.

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

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