

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Walsall

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Age group: All

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 113 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - meetings with 25 children and young people, and 23 parents and carers
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in December 2010
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from NHS Walsall and Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

4. Walsall has a resident population of approximately 60,585 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing 24% of the total population of the area. In 2012, 32% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 22.5% in England overall. Around 23% of pupils speak English as an additional language. Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu are the most recorded commonly spoken community languages in the area. Some 66% of minority ethnic pupils are of Asian background.
5. Walsall has 120 schools comprising 85 primary schools, 17 secondary schools, eight nurseries, seven special schools, two pupil referral units and one academy for children from reception through to sixth form. Early years service provision is delivered predominantly through the private and voluntary sector in over 270 settings.
6. Walsall Children and Young People's Partnership was set up in 2006. The partnership includes representatives of Walsall Council, NHS Walsall, West Midlands Police, West Midlands Probation Service, the Local Safeguarding Children Board, Adult Services, the Training Providers Forum and representatives for all local schools and colleges. The Local Safeguarding Children Board became independently chaired in May 2010 and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the area that provide safeguarding services.
7. Social care services for children are provided through 154 foster carers, five children's homes and twelve field social work teams (made up of three initial response teams, six safeguarding and family support teams and three corporate parenting teams), and a disabled children's team along with a range of externally commissioned services. The family placement service incorporates adoption and fostering teams, a team for young people leaving care and a youth justice service. There is an emergency duty team providing an out of hours service. Other family support services are delivered through area family support teams, 18 children's centres and extended services in schools. Services such as targeted youth support, positive activities and information, advice and guidance relating to young people's post-16 education and training plans are provided or coordinated through the integrated young people's support service.
8. At the time of the inspection there were 492 looked after children. They comprise 123 children less than five years of age, 328 children of school age (5–16) and 41 post-16 young people. A total of 175 young people had care leaver status. Walsall Council uses a virtual school approach in its support of the learning of looked after children. At the time of the

inspection there were 238 children who were the subject of a child protection plan. These comprise 104 females, 132 males and two unborn children.

9. Commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care are carried out by NHS Walsall. The main provider of community health services and acute hospital services is Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust. Tier 2 and 3 child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), are planned and commissioned jointly by NHS Walsall and Walsall Council and commissioned by NHS Walsall on behalf of NHS Dudley under the contractual arrangements with Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership Trust (DWMHPT).
10. In-patient CAMHS is provided in Birmingham by Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust primarily for eating disorders and commissioned on behalf of the local commissioners by the Specialist Commissioner Team West Midlands for all Tier 4 provision for in-patient and forensic services under a subscription arrangement across the West Midlands.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 4 (inadequate)

11. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is inadequate. Current safeguarding practice and management systems do not consistently ensure that the most vulnerable children in Walsall are effectively safeguarded or protected. Performance monitoring is inadequate. The range and scale of concerns relating to child protection practice had not been effectively identified by either the Strategic Partnership Board or Walsall Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB). Senior officers acknowledge that since 2010, while concentrating efforts elsewhere, there had been an insufficiently consistent focus on core safeguarding and child protection work.
12. Social work practice is too variable which has led to a significant number of children and young people receiving a poor service. Assessment of risk at the point of contact with children's social care is of an unacceptably poor quality in too many cases. This results in cases being closed inappropriately without risk being fully assessed and so children are left at potential risk of harm. This had been previously identified in January by the council and action is being taken to address this. However, to date there is no significant evidence of impact. Practice by the West Midlands Police and children's social care to protect children is ineffective in a significant number of cases. Strategy discussions do not meet the statutory requirements set out in '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' 2010 as often they do not involve the police or other partner agencies which does not enable effective information sharing and informed decision making. Similarly the police are not consistently contributing to joint child protection enquiries where this is appropriate. Overall the quality of assessments is inadequate. They do not consistently include assessments of risk or take into account the full range and extent of a child's family history. Children and young people receive an inconsistent response from agencies in response to domestic abuse incidents and on occasions the level of risk to children is not accurately assessed. In May the council introduced Signs of Safety risk assessments to be completed and this is being rolled out to other teams.
13. When children are in need of protection the plans to support them do not routinely identify risks, and interventions are not always appropriately focused on reducing the risk of harm. As a result children's situations do not significantly improve and in a significant proportion of cases seen children or members of their households were subject to further incidences of harm. The vast majority of assessments are not informed by the use of chronologies and do not focus on the experience of the child, with some children living in unacceptably poor circumstances for too long before effective action is taken. The safeguarding needs of children with disabilities are not considered in the majority of cases seen by inspectors.

Assessments of their needs are mainly focused on the needs of parents and in some cases assessments have not been updated for several years. As a result these potentially highly vulnerable children have had little or no opportunity to have their safeguarding or protection needs assessed. Further, senior management oversight has been ineffective in identifying the scale of concerns and has not prioritised the needs of disabled children. Managers have recently introduced a 'Signs of Safety' approach to improve the quality of all risk assessments and its use is evident in a small number of cases but it is too early to assess its impact.

14. Core groups do not occur with sufficient regularity and are in many cases not effective in ensuring the child protection plans are progressed and that levels of risk are being minimised and reducing. The frequency of visits to children in need of protection is not always linked to the levels of their individual need. Overall practice is not child-centred although in some cases sensitive work is undertaken to obtain the wishes and feelings of children. Quality assurance of casework is not sufficiently effective or robust in challenging poor standards of case management and recording. Management oversight is inadequate as it has not ensured that basic practice standards are met.
15. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements do not meet all of the requirements of national guidance as they do not consistently attend initial strategy discussions. However systems to ensure safe recruitment are of an adequate standard. Most complaints are effectively dealt with and resolved at an early stage but it is not always clear what learning has been gained by the local authority.
16. Effective arrangements between the West Midlands Police, social care and other agencies are in place to address concerns about children going missing. Most of the children and young people seen by inspectors said they feel safe where they live, in school and at home and they knew where to go if they felt unsafe and who they would contact.
17. Early intervention work to provide preventative support to children and young people is improving. However, inconsistencies in the quality of common assessment frameworks (CAFs) limit their effectiveness in improving outcomes for families. Area family support teams (AFST) are in the formative stages of development and not yet in place across the borough. Families who met inspectors were very positive about the support they were receiving through this particular approach. Education services and children's centres make a good contribution to safeguarding children and young people. The number of young people engaged in low level offending or anti-social behaviour is reducing and restorative justice is used effectively to divert young people from the criminal justice system. Targeted support provided for young carers is good although young carers identified as having additional needs are not eligible to access the service and this is a gap in provision for this vulnerable group.

18. Workforce planning and development is inadequate. Workforce planning, particularly in relation to the retention of experienced social workers, has been extremely problematic for Walsall over a number of years. This has resulted in the frequent use of agency staff and a relatively inexperienced staff group. The council has failed to ensure that it has a sufficiently skilled and experienced workforce to deliver an adequate safeguarding service. Recent salary remodelling has made Walsall a more attractive option for experienced workers but the impact of this is yet to be seen in front line services.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 4 (inadequate)

19. Capacity for improvement is inadequate. The council and its partners do not have a consistent track record of improving safeguarding services. All three areas for development identified in the unannounced inspection in January 2010 have not been satisfactorily addressed and two of the same areas were identified for development in the inspection in December 2010. The quality of assessments, concerns about the arrangements for, and recording of, strategy discussions and evidencing the explicit rationale for management decisions all remain as areas requiring significant improvement.
20. Strategic planning is not consistently effective in improving outcomes in quality of provision, particularly with reference to the most vulnerable children. Senior managers in the partnership and the WSCB were aware of concerns relating to the police in child protection processes for over six months but had not been able to resolve the situation. Senior managers have developed a preliminary summary action plan as a result of this inspection's findings which does not adequately address the extent of concerns identified in the inspection and does not fully address the degree to which increased capacity will be needed to deliver the required fundamental change.
21. Prior to the inspection senior managers had not clearly identified the extent or scale of improvements required in front line social work. Action to improve practice, such as a review of child protection plans, has begun but it is too soon to demonstrate any impact. The council and its partners have focused and relied on quantitative data which demonstrates good performance in the timeliness of completing assessments. However by not collecting, monitoring and analysing qualitative data, quality of practice issues were not identified or addressed.
22. Case file audits conducted by the council are often overly positive and do not routinely demonstrate how inadequate practice will be remedied or how systemic issues, such as the lack of risk assessments and very limited use of chronologies, will be addressed. A refreshed quality assurance framework has been developed but has not been fully implemented and so there is no evidence of any impact. Action is being undertaken with

regard to improving risk assessments, strategy discussions and reviewing child protection plans, however this has not yet had a significant impact on the quality of practice.

23. Multi-agency early intervention work providing preventative support to children and young people is showing some evidence of improvement.

Areas for improvement

24. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Walsall, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- implement a robust system of decision making and management oversight at the point of contact with children's social care
- ensure the involvement of police officers and all other relevant professionals in strategy discussions and meetings
- put arrangements in place to ensure appropriate police involvement in Section 47 investigations
- ensure that assessments contain an explicit assessment of risk, are child-centred and include evidence of children being seen
- ensure that assessments are of a satisfactory quality before being signed off by managers
- ensure that child protection plans are focused on risk and are clear about what needs to change and how this change will be supported
- ensure that core groups meet regularly and that children are visited with a frequency linked to the level of their need
- ensure that the domestic abuse referral team (DART) is appropriately staffed and resourced and provide a consistent and good quality response to assessing the risk to children of domestic abuse incidents.

Within three months:

- WSCB to improve challenge and quality assurance standards to ensure the delivery of front line safeguarding services and partnership work is effective
- ensure that the children with disabilities team and partner agencies provides a satisfactory service for disabled children and takes full account of the safeguarding needs of disabled children

- develop and implement a robust system of quality assurance to improve standards and disseminate learning. This to include ensuring staff receive consistently good standard supervision
- implement changes to ensure that the LADO arrangements are in keeping with national guidance
- implement the routine use of chronologies in children's social care services
- ensure that cases are allocated to suitably qualified, skilled and experienced staff
- the PCT and clinical commissioning group area NHS Walsall together with the North West cluster arrangement must provide clarity as to where the designated nurse will sit in the new clinical commissioning arrangements in order to ensure a strategic, professional lead
- Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust must ensure that all front line staff who have regular contact, or work predominately, with children and their families attend appropriate child protection training and that learning outcomes are monitored.

Within six months:

- implement a procedure to aggregate and disseminate learning from complaints.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 4 (inadequate)

25. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children are safe and feel safe is inadequate. Some children and young people in Walsall are not effectively protected or safeguarded. The standards of social work management and practice vary from inadequate to good. Where there are child protection concerns there is not always a prompt and coordinated response by social workers and partner agencies. Joint work between West Midlands Police and children's social care to protect children is not always effective. Children and young people receive an inconsistent response from agencies in cases of domestic abuse and evidence was seen where the level of risk to a child had been wrongly assessed, potentially leaving a child at unacceptable levels of risk. Plans to support children and young people often do not identify the risk to the child and so interventions are not always appropriately focused on reducing the risk of harm and improving safeguarding outcomes. In the vast majority of cases assessments are not child centred and do not convey a sense of what life is like for the child. In the children with disabilities team, the safeguarding needs of disabled children are not considered in most cases and so any potential or actual risks are unknown.
26. The LADO arrangements do not meet the requirements in national guidance as they do not attend the initial strategy discussions. However, in a small number of cases sampled by inspectors the recording of cases and their subsequent progress is variable. Some is of poor quality and does not examine wider safeguarding issues or address how parents will be informed about incidents. The council have previously recognised that there is a capacity issue which has led to the establishment of a full time LADO post.
27. In some cases children and young people attend child protection conferences and other significant meetings to promote their safety. In some cases work to prepare and support children and young people in these meetings by conference chairs and health and education professionals is of a high standard. WSCB has an effective Children and Young People's Shadow Board (SIT) which was established in 2010. The group provides young people with positive opportunities to be involved in making decisions relating to safeguarding practices and service delivery. The SIT has developed two safeguarding levels on the excellent 'Little Big Planet 2' computer game, focusing on themes such as bullying, forced marriage and domestic violence.

28. Systems to ensure safe recruitment meet national requirements and are adequate. Appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out and criminal record bureau (CRB) checks are up dated regularly. Most complaints are dealt with and resolved at an early stage. However, what has been learnt by the local authority as a result of a complaint is not always clear. Children and young people report that they are aware of how to make a complaint.
29. Effective arrangements between the West Midlands Police, social care and other agencies are in place to address concerns about children going missing. Appropriate arrangements are in place to prioritise those children most at risk. Multi-agency panels appropriately plan and track required actions. West Midlands Police undertake 'safe and well' checks when children return and 'The Street' team provides a good service to support young people who go missing. WSCB is kept informed of any wider safeguarding concerns relating to children going missing including any children at risk of sexual exploitation. Most children and young people seen by inspectors report feeling safe where they live and in school and know where and who to go to if they feel unsafe. Some 94% of children looked after who completed a survey as part of this inspection reported that they feel safe.
30. Education services and children's centres make a good contribution to safeguarding children and young people. Designated teachers for safeguarding report that there is always someone they can contact to seek advice however not all are confident when involved in complex cases. Children's attendance at schools, including persistent absenteeism, has improved and matches similar areas and the national average. Fixed term and permanent exclusions from primary schools has reduced significantly although the downward trend is less strong for secondary-aged pupils. Systems to monitor exclusions are robust and good partnership between schools and the pupil referral unit (PRU) ensures young people access education within six days of exclusions. Initiatives to promote positive relationships, develop young people's self-esteem and social skills are well embedded in schools and at Walsall College.
31. Young people seen by inspectors reported feeling safe in school and confident that concerns will be dealt with swiftly and effectively. Schools challenge racist, homophobic or disability related bullying. Attainment by some ethnic minority groups such as those from an Asian background demonstrates improvement. However this is not yet consistent across all groups and the attainment of White British boys in Walsall has been identified by the local authority as an area for further work. Provision for pupils whose families choose to home educate meets requirements and are subject to annual monitoring visits and more frequent visits if concerns arise. Safeguarding is a key component of the assessments undertaken for children and young people educated at home.

32. The number of young people engaged in low level offending or anti-social behaviour is reducing and good use is made of restorative justice. Young people are involved in a range of positive projects, such as working with the police to address issues of disability and equality. Initiatives such as the Cyberbus which provides positive access to computer technology for young people have had a positive impact on reducing disaffection and improving behaviour and safety. Young carers receive good support and reported that they value the opportunity to meet as a group and are positive about the staff. However, young carers with additional needs are not eligible for the service and so there is a gap in provision.
33. The most recent inspections of the local authority children's homes judged their safeguarding practices to be good or better. The local authority adoption, fostering services and private fostering services are judged good for safeguarding children. Three most recently inspected children's centres are judged to be good or outstanding.

Quality of provision

Grade 4 (inadequate)

34. The quality of provision of safeguarding services for children and young people is inadequate. Thresholds for identifying and responding to risk are not well embedded or shared across the partnership resulting in, for example, cases being closed too early and lack of clarity as to when and how a child protection enquiry must be undertaken.
35. The quality of CAF work is inconsistent, ranging from poor to good. Examples of good quality assessments were seen alongside less effective CAFs where the analysis does not identify desired outcomes and timescales clearly. Staff across a range of agencies have had access to appropriate CAF training but despite this the team around the child approach is underdeveloped limiting the potential to improve outcomes for children and families. Walsall does not use a 'family CAF' and so the process is particularly inefficient in large sibling groups where a CAF is completed for each individual child. However, early intervention work providing preventative support to children and young people is showing some evidence of improvement. The AFST are recent initiatives and are as yet not functioning across the whole borough. A very small number of families are currently supported through these new arrangements and there are early signs of success. Families who met inspectors were very positive about the support they were receiving from these teams. Schools have a good awareness of safeguarding issues and are proactive in identifying the needs of children and young people who are at risk of harm. In complex cases such as those identified as 'child concern', school staff report that their support needs are underdeveloped, for instance they do not receive one-to-one supervision.
36. All domestic abuse referrals are screened through the multi-agency DART and many families receive a satisfactory response. However, inspectors

saw high risk situations incorrectly identified as low risk which resulted in children and families not being offered the appropriate level of assessment and protection. Information supplied by the West Midlands Police is not always complete or sufficient to enable other agencies to prioritise situations appropriately. Resourcing issues have led to social work staff not being able to participate fully in DART. The council had made previous attempts to recruit a senior practitioner for this team and at the time of the inspection further work was being undertaken to recruit to this post. The police are not always able to provide 'bleep alarms' to all those families who need them. A good range of multi-agency services to support victims and families are in place and include independent domestic violence advocates who contact victims at the earliest stage.

37. Many children and young people at risk of significant harm are promptly identified and their cases allocated to a suitably qualified, trained and experienced social worker. However for some children, allocated workers are not suitably skilled, effective procedures are not followed and risk is not fully assessed. In the main, strategy discussions are poor, involve only a social worker and their manager and do not effectively plan for multi-agency actions to be taken. West Midlands Police are not always available for strategy discussions or to carry out child protection investigations.
38. The quality of assessments overall is inadequate. Many initial assessments are inadequate, failing to consider the impact of the harm on the child and only considering the needs of some of the children in the household. In the large majority of cases there is ineffective consideration of the risk factors to the children and young people concerned. This has resulted in some cases not being responded to promptly or thoroughly enough leaving children exposed to continuing harm. In the main, core assessments are not updated when further incidents occur or where there has been a significant change in circumstances. Pre-birth assessments are not timely, despite early referral of cases, which results in planning being rushed with little time to appropriately prepare parents for subsequent actions. Chronologies are not routinely used to take an overview of events in the case or to inform assessments. Very recent improvements in the quality of assessments as a result of the 'Signs of Safety' methodology were seen in a small number of cases. The quality of case recording is variable, with some very unclear and without focus alongside some good and up to date. For instance visits to children subject to plans do not routinely consider how safe children are or at times mention the child at all. Out of hours social work arrangements are satisfactory and ensure a prompt response to urgent situations.
39. In the main, parents and carers are positive about the support they receive from social workers and other agencies. However, the initial response team was criticised by a small number of parents that inspectors met, for poor communication and a confrontational approach to the non-abusive partner in child protection situations.

40. All child protection plans are reviewed within timescales and most agencies regularly attend reviews and conferences. However, reports to inform child protection case conferences are of very variable quality with most lacking consideration of risk and protective factors. Child protection plans are also of inconsistent quality with many lacking actions and clear timescales to improve the safety of the children concerned. Contingency plans are not routinely identified and it is not always clear what is actually expected of parents or carers. Visits by social workers to children subject to child protection plans are mainly regular and to identified timescales but in a small number of cases this was not happening. Visiting patterns to children are not always linked to the levels of individual need and risk. Most core groups are held regularly but this is not consistent and the links between the actions of the core group and the reduction of risk to children was not clear or sufficiently effective. A significant proportion of children subject to child protection plans, whose records were scrutinised by inspectors, had been exposed to further incidents of harm during the time they were subject to child protection plans.
41. The arrangements within children's social care for safeguarding disabled children are not effective. Multi-agency approaches to the delivery of services for disabled children are limited with each agency conducting their own individual assessments. This results in less effective information sharing and results in a more burdensome and less coordinated approach for children and their families. Social work assessments are not always conducted in line with national guidance, for example children are not always seen and in some cases there is no attempt to communicate directly with the child. Safeguarding concerns are not always identified and assessments in most cases centre on the needs of the parents. Some cases seen evidenced assessments that had not been updated or completed for several years. Where a disabled child or its sibling is subject to a child protection plan in another service area there is poor evidence of collaboration or account taken by the worker within the disabilities team. Concerns about the children with disabilities team had been recognised previously by the council who had bought the service back under council management. Action was being undertaken to improve the service, however there was no evidence of significant impact.
42. Social work supervision occurs regularly however its quality is variable and in the majority of cases it is not sufficiently effective. The quality of recording of supervision is very variable with no evidence of a consistent format. Frequent support, mentoring and protected caseloads are available for newly qualified workers. Managerial involvement is recorded on the electronic recording system and although the content is very variable, in some cases it is of high quality. Social workers report that Walsall Council is a good employer which offers high standards of training and support.

The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe Grade 3 (adequate)

43. The contribution of local health agencies to keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Commissioning and provider health organisations have effective arrangements in place to ensure an appropriate strategic and operational focus on safeguarding children. Effective audit processes ensure key safeguarding procedures, including Section 11 audits, are complied with. Where non compliance is found actions are taken and the progress to complete them followed up. Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust also undertakes its own inspections of front line services to test compliance.
44. Contract specifications contain appropriate safeguarding requirements and providers report on compliance at regular intervals. The transition to a Walsall clinical commissioning group is managed well and arrangements are under way to ensure provider trusts remain accountable for the quality of services, including safeguarding that they provide. The low uptake of child protection training at Levels 2 and 3 in the main provider trust has been appropriately addressed through developing an accessible e-learning package which will work in conjunction with face to face training. General practitioners (GPs) are well represented on the Shadow Health and Well-being Board.
45. Health partners are effectively involved with partners with good attendance at LSCB and child protection meetings. An appropriate and effective child death overview panel (CDOP) is in place and staff report it works. A clear and appropriate sudden unexpected death in children regional policy is in place and clinicians routinely attend rapid response meetings. Good support is in place for bereaved families.
46. Performance in relation to staff receiving appropriate training in child protection is variable. There is good uptake, around 90%, in CAMHS and primary medical services. However, in other key front line services such as the emergency department and paediatric wards uptake at Level 3 is inadequate and is not in line with *'Working Together to Safeguard Children'*, 2010 or national guidance. Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust has identified this as a risk and appropriate action is being taken and systems are in place to monitor progress. All clinical staff have appropriate access to supervision through safeguarding teams. Formal child protection supervision arrangements are in place for most groups of staff and this works well with 92% of these staff attending. Plans to provide regular supervision arrangements for community midwives are being progressed effectively.
47. Support provided by both designated and named professionals is held in very high regard by staff. The good quality joint strategic needs assessment underpins priorities contained in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and action has been taken to address teenage

pregnancy, smoking cessation and breast feeding rates, which are now showing improvement. GP engagement in safeguarding has significantly improved following the dissemination of learning from a serious case review and uptake of appropriate child protection training has significantly improved. However, they do not routinely attend child protection conferences.

48. Appropriate local sexual assault and referral services are in place and are jointly funded by West Midlands Police and NHS Walsall. The sexual assault and referral centre (SARC) provides a good service to young people aged 13 years and over and to adults. For younger children under 13 years good provision is in place for child protection medicals and alleged sexual assaults via the Starfish Unit in Manor Hospital and the designated doctor. There are very good and effective links to genito-urinary medicine (GUM) services and similarly to strong third sector provision via Crisis Point to support children, young people and their families throughout the examination and prosecution processes. Plans are progressing to bring sexual assault referral services up to 'gold' standard within the region.
49. The emergency department has appropriately trained staff and effective procedures in place to recognise, assess and make appropriate referrals when necessary. The resuscitation room contains a bay set up for paediatrics and all relevant staff are trained in paediatric life support with regular updates provided. Good oversight from the paediatric liaison nurse identifies those children who might be at greater risk. Effective arrangements ensure that GPs are notified of attendances at emergency and urgent care settings. Appropriate processes are in place to ensure relevant consents are sought and that individuals are advised of information sharing protocols. Midwifery staff use pre-birth assessments to identify vulnerabilities in pregnant women, which staff report as working well. A named professional regularly attends multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) and effective arrangements are in place to raise awareness of specific issue with staff.
50. Universal child and family health services work well with effective information sharing mechanisms in place. The Healthy Child programme is being delivered with good effect despite significant pressure due to limited capacity in health visiting and school nursing teams. Health visitors have over 800 cases which is high and over the recommended levels. Increases in capacity are planned with additional health visitor posts being created and filled later in 2012. Good performance is demonstrated in relation to immunisation rates and Walsall performs better than both statistical neighbours and the national average. Increasingly effective targeted and one to one support is available to teenagers who are pregnant and includes support for young fathers through children's centres and Sure Starts. This support is beginning to improve the under 18 conception rate although it remains higher than both regional and national averages.

51. Children and young people with disabilities have good access to a range of hospital and community based services. The complex care and short break panel effectively review care packages provided to children and their parents. However, parents of children with Autistic Spectrum disorder are dissatisfied with delays in diagnosis and are critical of health, education and social care services ability to work together. Children's community health services report ongoing challenges in getting referrals accepted by the children with disabilities team when safeguarding concerns are identified.
52. The rate of hospital admissions for children and young people with mental health conditions is low and significantly better than the national rate. Children and young people have good access to CAMHS and specialist provision is well regarded. In emergencies over weekends young people are cared for on the paediatric ward, which is not ideal. Paediatric staff take appropriate action to minimise risks and report that CAMHS staff will provide support if required.
53. Fewer Walsall children report using alcohol and drugs compared with the national rates and the rate of hospital admissions for substance misuse is low and significantly better than the national rate. There is good access to the young people's substance misuse services via T3 (the substance misuse team), Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and effective partnership working with Addaction, the adult substance misuse service. Staff report that transition arrangements work very well and start when the young person is aged 18 and a half.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 4 (inadequate)

54. Ambition for, and prioritisation of, safeguarding services to children and young people are inadequate. The council and its partners articulate their ambitions and priorities well but priorities have not been based on an accurate understanding of current service effectiveness. Inadequate performance management has led to a lack of awareness of the wide ranging weaknesses in service provision therefore plans have not been based on an accurate assessment of service delivery and have failed to ensure that the most vulnerable children are protected.
55. Governance and working arrangements with the Strategic Partnership, Lead Member, WSCB and wider council are clear and appropriate. However, the quality of challenge and leadership the LSCB provides has not ensured that all key agencies and services are consistently meeting acceptable standards or appropriate prioritisation of child protection. For instance, concerns about West Midlands Police were fully known by the board in January 2012 and no effective action was taken. Further, the board's commissioned case file audit in relation to disabled children did not identify the depth or range of deficits within the service.

56. Quality assurance processes have not been sufficiently effective to identify significant weaknesses in service provision or to assess the impact on or potential risk to children and young people.
57. Elected members appropriately champion the needs of children and young people and are responsive to their needs such as responding promptly to secure resources and rebuild a special school for children with complex needs. However, as a result of not being provided with accurate, qualitative information they have not been able to fully hold officers to account for poor service provision. Young people, such as those who have been involved with the youth offending team, regularly attend scrutiny panels and share their experiences. Members have acted responsively to the needs of disabled children as, after visiting a special school, they closed the poor quality building and promptly had a new school rebuilt.

Leadership and management

Grade 4 (inadequate)

58. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children are inadequate. Significant weaknesses are present in the delivery of front line safeguarding services. Senior managers in the local authority and within the partnership have had a limited understanding of these issues and the work to tackle them has been inadequate. At the time of the inspection there was significant variation in the quality of services in children's social care and for some children this was inadequate. Not all children and young people are effectively safeguarded. WSCB has failed to identify the significant weaknesses in front line child protection services and where weaknesses have been identified these have not been effectively addressed.
59. Expenditure is managed well and in line with budgets which are underpinned by an analysis of current and future demand. However, as a result of inaccurate understanding of the extent of development required resources have not always been directed with the necessary focus. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are inadequate and do not ensure that all children and young people receive a service that is delivered to national standards. Also, neither process gives senior managers an accurate picture of the quality of front line practice.
60. Workforce development is inadequate and has not ensured that managers and social workers have had sufficient experience, skills and knowledge to effectively provide social work services for children in Walsall. Children's social care services have had major difficulties in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of suitably experienced social workers for a number of years. Recruitment and retention has improved in children's social care over the last 2 years. At the time of the inspection the social worker cohort was composed mainly of permanent workers of two years or less experience with short-term agency staff recruited to ensure that key posts were filled. Lack of experience and skills in the safeguarding teams

presents significant challenges for the local authority in ensuring the delivery of front line services which consistently meet acceptable standards. At the time of inspection managers acknowledged that some staff who are not of a sufficiently good standard, are still in post. However, the council are taking prompt action to address the matter in response to inspection findings. The workforce broadly reflects the community it serves.

61. Remodelling of the structure of children's social care safeguarding teams has resulted in additional management capacity being created. Good work to implement a caseload weighting scheme has ensured that social workers have manageable caseloads. Workers are complimentary about the management support they receive and the availability of training to further develop their skills. However, overall this has been ineffective in raising standards of practice to an acceptable level. Newly qualified workers are provided with mentoring, protected caseloads and more regular supervision to support their professional development. The quality of the supervision seen is variable and has not been fully effective in promoting high quality standards and improving the practice of some workers. The vast majority of cases in the safeguarding teams are allocated to qualified social workers however a few children in need cases are allocated to unqualified workers.
62. Good examples of the involvement of children and young people are evident. For instance Youth of Walsall is an effective borough wide group of young people acting as a youth cabinet and forging links with all other active involvement groups. Young people report that they have good access to senior officers, the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive. However, the importance of seeking the views of children and young people is not embedded across all services. Children and young people are not always seen as part of assessments and their attendance at relevant child protection meetings is variable.
63. There are some joint commissioned services such as the CAMHS and the substance misuse team within the youth justice service. All commissioned services are underpinned by analysis of need and are supported by outcome based contracts and benchmarked to ensure value for money. Appropriate systems are in place to decommission services. Overall, joint commissioning is under-developed and is not brought together in a structural framework and this area for development is acknowledged by senior managers.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 4 (inadequate)

64. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are inadequate. Unacceptably poor standards of management decision making, child protection work and partner involvement have not been fully

identified despite an established framework for managing performance being in place across the strategic partnership (Performance Outcomes Group). The same is true of the systems for performance management undertaken by the WSCB. However, performance is reviewed annually and measures are underpinned by a multi-agency needs analysis.

65. The local authority and WSCB have focused on improving the numerical performance and timeliness of child protection work across services for children. A recently developed 'balanced scorecard' provides a detailed summary for each social work team and as a result many performance indicators show improvements but has failed to sufficiently monitor services to the most vulnerable children. The quality of much of this work continues to be inconsistent and for instance, many assessments are inadequate, failing to consider the risks to children within a family.
66. Evaluation is not well developed or significantly used to drive improvements. Quality assurance audits have been conducted but these are inadequate due to being too variable in quality themselves. They are characterised by inconsistencies in format and a lack of clarity on how serious issues that are identified are to be addressed and how learning is to be taken forward. Senior managers acknowledged that the information coming from their performance management and quality assurance systems had concerned them about some aspects of practice. However, their systems had failed to identify the full scale of issues within safeguarding services.

Partnership working

Grade 4 (inadequate)

67. Partnership working arrangements are inadequate. Front line child protection and children in need partnership work is variable and ineffective in ensuring all children are protected. Multi-agency work in relation to domestic abuse, assessments of need, child protection investigations and plans is not consistently of a satisfactory standard. Strategy meetings continue to be of variable quality despite being identified as an issue in the last two Ofsted unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment in 2010 and by a serious case review action plan in 2011. West Midlands Police are not always available to respond to urgent child protection matters whereas health visitors and school nurses are appropriately involved in child protection review processes.
68. The WSCB has failed in a key aspect of its role which is to monitor the effectiveness of services to the most vulnerable children. The WSCB chair acknowledges she and the Board should have been aware of the situation. Further, the chair and the Board were aware of the capacity issues within West Midlands Police to respond to child protection matters but did not progress the issue with sufficiently assertive leadership to resolve the situation.

69. The independent chair of the WSCB is a member of the Children's Partnership Board with a role in holding it to account on matters relating to safeguarding and child protection. There is broad multi-agency representation from local agencies and a business plan is in place which sets out the WSCB's vision and its key priorities. The chair of the WSCB also prepares reports on the effectiveness of the arrangements to the Council's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Lead Member.
70. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and MARAC have good partnership representation at meetings. The multi-agency domestic abuse forum meets regularly to evaluate new referrals and take relevant actions. There is some good work in particular in raising awareness of young people of these issues. However there are significant resource issues for agencies and information sharing is variable which in some cases has resulted in inadequate risk assessments. West Midlands Police, Walsall Council and the voluntary sector are working together effectively to provide positive activities for children and young people which are helping to reduce anti-social behaviour and offending.
71. Good work has been undertaken with the local minority ethnic communities, for instance training delivered to mosques to increase community awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and safeguarding issues on children and young people. Missing children and child sexual exploitation issues are tackled by a range of partner agencies coordinating well together. An appropriate and effective child death overview panel (CDOP) is in place. Multi-agency early intervention work providing preventative support to children and young people is showing some evidence of improvement.
72. Partnership working in relation to children with a disability is inadequate evidenced by poor joint strategic planning and coordinated delivery of services. Disabled children and their families are subject to several assessments whilst thresholds to access are unclear. Partner agencies report challenges in getting referrals accepted where there are safeguarding concerns about disabled children but have been unable to resolve them satisfactorily.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

73. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and young people is adequate. The local authority and partners meet their statutory responsibilities and the specific focus directed to the service by senior managers since 2010 has resulted in significant service improvement albeit from a low starting point. Outcomes in all areas are at least adequate and are good in terms of being healthy and making a positive contribution. Leadership and management of services for looked after children is generally effective, and has resulted in a range of good quality placements. Children who need to be adopted are placed in a timely way and permanence planning is effective. Walsall perform well on most areas of the adoption scorecard. Looked after children feel safe in their placements and a number of looked after children are remaining in their foster placements after age 18. The placement resources team are successfully developing their response to the sufficiency duty.
74. The overall quality of provision for looked after children and young people is adequate. Although the quality of assessment and care planning is generally satisfactory evidence was seen of some children who experience neglect and emotional abuse waiting too long before admission to care or the initiation of legal proceedings. Also, some assessments provide too limited an analysis of needs and are not updated when circumstances change. Chronologies are not always used effectively to provide an overview of a child's care journey. Pathway plans are of inconsistent quality and many lack a clear plan of how actions will be carried out with only tentative suggestions as to what is required. However, personal education plans are of adequate quality overall. Quality assurance processes are not sufficiently robust and although regular case file auditing is in place the quality of these audits is too variable to identify weaknesses and drive improvements in some areas. Partnership working is effective overall and looked after young people's views and opinions are regularly sought, positively influencing services that they use. However, delays in sharing information with health professionals delays the routine completion of timely initial health assessments

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

75. The capacity of services to looked after children and young people to improve is adequate. The council have not been able to implement and sustain consistency in the quality of pathway plans and assessments. Also, for some children there are delays and inconsistencies in decision making when some children need to become looked after. However, the track record of improving outcomes for children and young people is, in some areas, good and improving. For instance the council and its partners are

achieving a reduction in not only overall numbers of looked after children but also the length of time a child spends in care. The partnership has clear ambitions for looked after children and articulates its priorities through all levels of planning. The council, health services and partners demonstrate a considered understanding of the needs of looked after children and have resources in place to address them. An increasingly effective focus on intervention to appropriately divert children and young people from care is being delivered by services such as Think Family intensive support who also support looked after children after they are returned to their families. However, effectiveness cannot be confidently evaluated due to a lack of clarity about thresholds in safeguarding services where some looked after children cases sit and an absence of a comprehensive analysis of outcomes for children receiving edge of care services. In cases inspected evidence was seen of looked after children whose needs are best met by being in public care.

76. The placements resources team is taking a regional lead in developing a sufficiency of appropriate placements. Some improvement in workforce planning has resulted in all looked after children having an allocated, qualified social worker whose caseload is manageable. Young people are routinely consulted and their views influence service developments such as the development of the corporate parenting strategy and the regular review of progress made to deliver the Pledge by the Children in Care Council, Council4Kids. However, seeking the active involvement of children who have a disability and those placed out of borough is identified as an area for improvement.

Areas for improvement

77. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and young people in Walsall, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure that assessments provide a satisfactory standard of analysis and are updated to take into account changes in circumstances
- ensure that a robust system is implemented to avoid delay and assess at the earliest stage whether children and young people need to be in care
- ensure that children are always seen alone during statutory visits and that their views are recorded on case files.

Within three months:

- implement a robust system to oversee the appropriate use of and compliance with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review

regulations 2010 in relation to children placed at home on care orders. Also, ensure that related, appropriate training is available for social workers and managers

- ensure that chronologies are always completed and are accessible via the electronic record
- children's social care services to implement a system of prompt information sharing about children newly looked after with the children in care health team to ensure initial review health assessments consistently meet required timescales
- ensure that Pathway Plans are of a consistently satisfactory quality and that they are completed by suitably qualified and experienced workers.

Within six months:

- implement a system whereby a child's journey can be determined through the linking of the electronic case file and hard copy contextual information.

How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?

Being healthy

Grade 2 (good)

78. Health outcomes for looked after children and young people are good. Children benefit well from this team which includes both a designated doctor and nurse. Walsall shows strong performance over a number of years in relation to immunisations for looked after children with a rate of 98.7% in 2010-11 compared to statistical neighbours at 76.3%. Performance is also good for looked after children who had their teeth checked by a dentist at 97.5% of compared with 82.4% for the national average. Most children and young people have access to a comprehensive review health assessment and again performance is good. Information sharing with children's social care has improved but remains a significant concern because of its impact on the looked after health team's ability to deliver timely initial health assessments. Only 58% of notifications of looked after children are received by the health team within five days. The importance of the notification is included in the health induction training for social workers but variable performance suggests further work is needed.
79. Emotional health and well-being is assessed and the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is used well to identify emotional health and well-being needs. The CAMHS in Walsall offers good access to specialist mental health provision, which is well regarded. Processes for children placed out of the borough to access CAMHS are challenging but commissioners are aware of this and are taking appropriate action.
80. Good health promotion is provided for looked after children and 'The Health Fax' is given to children aged 11 providing them with a written record of their health history as well as health promotion information. When young people leave care the health advisor offers a weekly drop-in service at the base of the transition and leaving care team. Young people have good access to substance misuse support. T3, the effective specialist substance misuse service is easily accessible to young people, their carers and professionals. The looked after children health team has good links with the teenage pregnancy operational group and with the young people at risk of sexual exploitation group. For looked after young people under the age of 16 in Walsall the pregnancy rate is low but high in those care leavers aged 19 years. Most pregnant teenagers are effectively engaged with the family nurse partnership.
81. Appropriate governance, regular reporting and quality monitoring arrangements are in place with regard to children placed both in and outside of the borough. The looked after children health team report annually on their performance and carry out a range of satisfactory audits

that include children and young people's satisfaction with the service, social work attendance at initial health needs assessment and the quality of health assessments. For out of area placements the team will liaise with relevant professionals to address any concerns regarding the quality of assessments and plans. Those that are not rated as satisfactory are returned for further work.

Staying safe

Grade 3 (adequate)

82. Safeguarding arrangements for looked after children and young people are adequate. Most looked after children who responded to the Care4Me survey reported feeling safe or fairly safe and that they know at least one person they can contact if they were being harmed. Children and young people in care interviewed as part of the inspection report feeling safe and well supported in care. Some younger children interviewed report periodic stigmatisation and bullying at school by peers because they are in care, however all said that their teachers act promptly to deal with this. Looked after children largely live in stable placements providing good quality care and support. A strong focus on improving permanent care outcomes has been successful and there are improving rates of placement stability. Effective arrangements which include regular social work visits and monthly progress reports against set outcomes are used to monitor care placements and planning, for those children placed outside of the local area. In addition, 94% of all reviews are held within timescales. Placements are generally well matched to the needs of looked after children and appropriate priority is given to their ethnicity, cultural and religious identity. Nonetheless Walsall has difficulties in finding placements for large sibling groups, teenagers - particularly girls - and Muslim children.
83. Thresholds for determining when children need to be looked after are not applied with sufficient consistency. In some instances delay has occurred in bringing proceedings where children have suffered long periods of neglect or emotional abuse. For a number of children increasing use has been made of family and friends care arrangements. In some cases family group conferencing is used effectively. There is some evidence of the increasingly effective early intervention with good outcomes being delivered by services such as 'Think Family' to appropriately divert children and young people from care as well as supporting looked after children after they are returned to their families.
84. Arrangements for supervising contact between looked after children and their parents and family members are safe. However, during the inspection concerns were expressed by foster carers about the organisation of contact workers. In particular dissatisfaction was expressed about the frequency with which a child's contact worker was changed and the suitability of contact centre buildings. It is understood

that the council are pursuing these matters and has already committed to setting up a new purpose built provision.

85. All looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers, however, during the inspection some young people expressed concern about the high turnover of social workers with some older young people having experienced very high numbers of worker change. The turnover of social workers is gradually reducing but for many young people the independent reviewing officer (IRO) is the only consistent professional in their lives. There is evidence of good joint partnership working among agencies who are actively engaged in ensuring the safety and welfare of looked after children and care leavers.
86. The last inspection reports of Walsall's fostering and adoption services judged them to be good. The most recent inspections of the five children's homes managed by Walsall found three outstanding and two good.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3 (adequate)

87. Outcomes for enjoying and achieving are adequate. At Key Stage 2, tests results for looked after children match the national average. From low starting points in early years, children make good progress in their primary schools, particularly in English. At GCSE, results match the national average for looked after children but only a very small number of young people achieve five or more GCSE at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. The virtual school is well established and is highly regarded by designated teachers. Staff in the virtual school team are highly committed to raising standards and have a good understanding of the needs of the looked after children population.
88. Good management of targeted additional support ensures that, although still very wide, the attainment gap between looked after children and all young people in Walsall is steadily reducing. The early years enrichment project shows positive impact on literacy skills providing good support for foster carers. The homework club in a local grammar school and the ICT project in a primary school inspire looked after children and develop the confidence and self-esteem of those who attend. Effective strategies to narrow the gap in achievement include one to one support through the 'Creating Chances' programme, robust monitoring of individual progress and attainment and well-planned training for carers and designated teachers.
89. The quality of personal education plans (PEPs) has been improved and overall they are satisfactory. Young people and carers are involved in the review of the PEP and their views are sought. The best PEPs identify clearly the progress made over time and provide specific actions to raise achievement further. Some PEPs are not helpful enough, particularly for secondary-aged pupils because they do not consistently cover the full breadth of curriculum subjects or are not providing detailed, realistic and

achievable targets. Creative actions to improve outcomes are not always identified. The pupil premium is underused in some cases, for example to improve numeracy skills or address disengagement with school. Plans are in hand to improve the quality of PEPs further and the format is regularly revised to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

90. Attendance overall is good and improving. Persistent absence is below the national and regional averages and action taken to reduce unauthorised absence has been effective. Schools work well with the virtual school team and carers to ensure that any concerns about school attendance are quickly resolved. Looked after children are not permanently excluded from school. In the last reporting year the rate of fixed-term exclusions was higher than average, however recent data shows improvement. The virtual school ensures that all young people excluded from a school in Walsall are accessing education from the first day of exclusion. However, this is not yet consistent for excluded young people who attend out of borough schools.
91. Children and young people's achievements are regularly celebrated. Good opportunities are provided for young people to experience leisure, cultural, sport and social activity. Young people report that the 'Excellence Tea Party' and the 'Excellent Night Out' were very enjoyable. Young people help plan and organise these events. The 'Lots of Leisure' programme supports looked after children who wish to join mainstream local leisure activities. Foster carers have access to free swimming and library card schemes. Transport to enrichment activities is provided by the virtual school.

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement

Grade 2 (good)

92. Arrangements for looked after children to make a positive contribution are good. Children feel that they are supported to engage in a range of positive activities and those who met inspectors report positively on their experience of care. They report that they feel properly consulted and that their lives and opportunities have improved. They are confident in the care and support services provided to them by their carers, social workers and teachers.
93. There are good examples of how young people's suggestions have influenced service developments and provision, such as the development of the corporate parenting strategy, the regular review of progress made to deliver the Pledge and the work of the Children in Care Council, Council4Kids. Seeking the active involvement of children who have a disability and those placed out of borough is identified as an area for improvement by the council and work is in hand to improve further the use of e-communication. The care leavers who met inspectors say that their views and opinions are sought. They gave an example of how they

had influenced positively the provision of activities during the summer holidays, made DVDs on what it is like to be in care and lifted the blanket ban on taking photographs of children in care. Young people have been involved in training foster carers and elected members and getting passports for all looked after children. The borough wide group of young people YOW (Youth of Walsall) is forging links with all other active involvement groups, working on a big questionnaire to gather the views of all young people. Care leavers value the special events run to engage with older young people.

94. The young people on the Council4Kids maintain good communication with senior officers and elected members. The young people who met inspectors were not entirely confident about the impact of their presence on the Corporate Parenting Board describing the Board as a quite intimidating group of powerful adults. Young people are able to describe activities that they are involved in to raise the participation of the wider group of looked after children and reflected how this helps their confidence grow. They appreciate the help they receive from their participation worker. Young people feel that Walsall is generally a safe place but are concerned about the closure of youth clubs. In an effort to strengthen relationships between Board members and the Council4Kids a fun activity is currently being arranged. The majority of Corporate Parenting Board members have received Total Respect training to help them understand how they can become better corporate parents.
95. Children and young people, including care leavers, have good access to advocacy and most are clear about the process of how to make a complaint. A well established independent advocacy service provided by the Children's Society provides prompt and effective service enabling early resolution of issues young people have. Designated teachers report that IROs are very effective and know the children very well. The care leavers who met inspectors were mainly concerned about the numerous changes of social workers they have experienced over their time in care leading to a lack of trust and engagement.
96. The percentage of looked after children receiving a reprimand, final warning or conviction in the year to 31 March 2012 (7.8%) was slightly above similar areas and England. Performance in 2001/12 shows further improvement. Much work has been undertaken to reduce offending and the use of restorative justice, particularly in the children's homes, has been effective with overall offending showing a downward trend. The 'Team A', 'Lots of Leisure' programme and the police 'Box Clever' project run at Walsall police station are examples of successful initiatives having a positive impact on behaviour. The integrated young people's support services and other agencies such as Spurgeons provide a good range of preventative activities to engage young people at risk of anti-social behaviour.

97. Advocacy provision is commissioned from the Children's Society. It is well established and referrals are responded to promptly. Most issues taken up by advocates are successfully resolved at an early stage without resort to the complaints process. In the past year the most significant themes emerging have related to education and about contact arrangements. An independent visiting resource is also commissioned although the level of use is low.

Economic well-being

Grade 3 (adequate)

98. The impact of services to promote the economic well-being of looked after children and care leavers is adequate. A range of projects is in place to ensure that all young people are positively engaged post 16 and the proportion of young people in employment, education or training by age 19 is above average. Care leavers are well known to services and young people seen by inspectors are satisfied with the support, advice and guidance available to them. The apprenticeship placement programme has had a positive impact as it has enabled 15 young people to gain apprenticeships over the last three years, however, other partners such as health services, have been slow to offer such placements.
99. The influence of the virtual school is not strong enough post-16. Although all young people who leave compulsory education at the end of Year 11 have a September promise of a learning or training placement, retention on the chosen pathway is not secure. Young people on courses at the local college make good progress and the completion rate is high. However, across the full cohort of care leavers, the monitoring of post-16 education achievement is not sufficiently embedded. Narrowing the attainment gap between all young people in Walsall and care leavers, including promoting entry and success in higher education, is an area for development. Young people who are age 16 or over do not benefit from the full engagement of the virtual school as a result of summer universities and engagement in higher education being seen as each individual school's responsibility. Pathway plans are of inconsistent quality. Many do not include a review date and are a descriptive list of needs lacking a clear plan of how actions will be carried out with only tentative suggestions about what is required.
100. The range of accommodation provided for care leavers is sufficient and appropriate. Young people say that they get good support to prepare for independent living. The 'staying put' policy provides stability for young people who are in education or training. Care leavers have access to a range of supported, permanent and affordable accommodation which meets their needs and bed and breakfast accommodation is not used. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to provide accommodation for care leavers outside Walsall if required.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

101. The quality of provision for looked after children and young people is adequate. The range of direct work by family support services in Walsall for children at the edge of care is mainly effective in diverting children from care and has had an impact on reducing the numbers of children in care. A broad range of services includes family group conferencing and intensive family support for parents finding it difficult to manage children and their behaviour. This support is also used to safely reintegrate children and young people back to their families from care placements. Evidence was seen of some children experiencing neglect and emotional abuse who wait too long before admission to care or for legal proceedings to be initiated. There is no mechanism such as an admissions panel to monitor whether children and young people need to be in care. Most children interviewed as part of the inspection reported that the care and the support they receive are good. Of the 32 children and young people responding to the Care4Me survey, 29 thought they were in the right placement and 28 said their care was very good or good. Parents whose children are looked after express a range of views about their experiences of social work services.
102. The quality of assessment is variable and in most cases demonstrates effective partnership working. Assessments submitted in care proceedings usually provide a good understanding of the needs of looked after children and include the views of children and their parents and carers. However, in some cases core assessments provide either shallow analysis or are not updated to take into account changes in circumstances. Comprehensive parenting risk assessments are undertaken during court proceedings but where the subsequent plan is to return the child to the birth family risk assessments are not consistently robust. Statutory requirements are being met to ensure that children's needs and safety is being met in placements. Minimum statutory visiting is met although there is insufficient consistency in recording to confirm that children are being seen alone. Although an improving situation, children and young people who have been in care for some time report many changes in social worker and that the consistent professionals in their lives are their carers and their IRO.
103. In general the planning, review and monitoring process for looked after children is effective and includes evidence of partnership work. However, at times it does not identify failing placements early enough. Adoption planning is good and underpinned by thorough needs assessment, clear analysis and careful matching with potential adopters. IROs have significant impact in raising the quality of permanency planning as well as the quality of children's participation in their reviews. Care plans are of a variable quality overall and demonstrate an improved level of focus after a plan for permanence is agreed. In some cases where children experience several changes in placement, plans are not sufficiently clear or respond to events. Timeliness of reviews is improving. IROs oversee the progress

of care plans between looked after children reviews and introduced a red, amber, green (RAG) rating system which is largely focused on minimising delays in assessments and securing appropriate placements.

104. Case file recording is generally up to date but insufficient attention is paid to the quality of assessment and the accuracy and completeness of file records. For looked after children who have been in care for long periods much important contextual information is held on paper files and due to the absence of chronologies and key assessments it is very difficult to determine the child's journey from the electronic record. Chronologies are not always completed or accessible via the electronic record. In the main, basic ethnicity, cultural and religious identity is recorded. Although not consistent there is evidence on some case files that assessment and case planning sensitively takes account of children's cultural needs.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 3 (adequate)

105. The ambition for, and prioritisation of, services for looked after children and young people are adequate. The local authority, elected members and its partners are in the most part effective and ambitious leaders who safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children through the overarching Children and Young People's Plan, where looked after children are a clear priority. However, managers have not identified the delays in some children becoming looked after as an area of concern or as a priority for action. The placement resources team has achievable, ambitious objectives to meet their sufficiency duty. Effective regional commissioning underpins plans that provide Walsall with value for money in placement provision. Young people are encouraged to 'stay put' and increasing the skills of foster carers to care for older, more challenging young people is evidenced by the commissioning of KEEP training.
106. Corporate parenting is established and the Pledge which children and young people actively contributed to developing has recently been refreshed. The Council4kids group is routinely involved in meetings of the Board and at times contributes to full agenda discussion not just to that concerning the Pledge. Work is underway to increase the confidence of young people and increase their participation further.
107. Elected members champion the needs and aspirations of looked after children and children regularly attend scrutiny panels to share their experiences with members. However, they are at an early stage of acting directly to improve their lives or acting upon their stated wishes.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

108. Leadership and management of services to looked after children and young people are adequate. The sharp focus brought to services for looked after children since 2010 by the council and its partners has improved the quality and extent of provision from a low base. Political

leaders are committed to increased aspirations for this group of children and young people. This is despite the difficult economic climate and challenging issues for workforce recruitment and retention. Although there are some signs of increasing stability among social workers for looked after children there is significant variability in their experience and the quality of their practice. It is not clear that the current workforce strategy will resolve this situation.

109. Managers have a good understanding of resource and practice deficits and are developing responses to the requirements of the sufficiency duty. Placement choice is generally satisfactory and there is some reserve in-house foster placement capacity. Increased choice for young people is provided by the 'stay put' supported lodgings scheme. Difficulties remain in recruiting foster carers for children such as those presenting challenging behaviour and attachment disorders as well as for some minority ethnic groups. Training for carers using the KEEP behavioural management scheme aims to reduce placement breakdown and encourage foster carers to take on more difficult placements. Work has started with regional partners in developing a therapeutic multi-treatment foster care scheme which has government grant funding. Placement costs have been consistently driven down by the placement and resources team and the CIPFA Looked After Benchmarking Club 2011 indicated that Walsall was one of the best performing authorities in terms of unit costs.
110. Council officers in partnership with regional colleagues have developed an effective analysis to predict numbers of children who will require care. The Regional Regression Analysis resulted from work with Wolverhampton University. Elected members and senior officers in Walsall have accepted this analysis and last year the council invested an extra 1.2 million in children's services. Some of this investment was used well to develop services at the edge of care and high level prevention services for the predicted increasing numbers of children identified as in need of targeted services.
111. All looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers and unqualified staff are linked to many children to enhance direct work and contact arrangements. Protection is given to NQSWs and their caseloads reflect appropriate levels of volume and complexity. Social workers report manageable caseloads and regular supervision as well as extensive opportunities for training.
112. Complaints are dealt with and resolved at an early stage and looked after children and young people report that they are aware of how to make a complaint. The analysis of complaints is not effective as it does not make clear what the nature of a complaint is. The absence of a system for learning from complaints is a missed opportunity for managers to respond and improve services.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (adequate)

113. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements for looked after children and young people are adequate. Appropriate arrangements are in place for managing performance through the Strategic Partnership Board performance group (POG) and within the WSCB reporting arrangements. Performance against some key indicators such as children placed for adoption and children receiving a dental check is good and in line with or better than comparators. Quality assurance is not sufficiently robust. Regular case file auditing is in place but the quality of audits is too variable. Many audits are superficial and are insufficiently critical of the quality of work undertaken, similarly some audit tools are incomplete and not fit for purpose.
114. Managers report regular oversight of case planning and review and offer focused support to staff at all levels. Good opportunities for training and professional development are available to social workers and evidenced from supervision files and interviews with social workers but there is variable evidence of its impact on practice. Some good work, informed by training, was seen in adoption cases. Supervision files seen show that regular planned supervision is occurring. Staff have good access to management support and teams are being configured into 'pods', where the whole team takes ownership of cases, to develop better support and knowledge of case work. However supervision recording suggests there is little reflective supervision taking place. Case files evidence front line managers' involvement in case management but it is not always clear how effective they are in directing casework. Similarly where performance issues have been identified systematic follow up and review is not generally evident.
115. Effective permanence and resource panels are in place to ensure close adherence to permanency planning time scales and to assure the best use of in-house placement resources and value for money. Linked to the placement resources team the panels assure appropriate standards of placement choice and matching. However it is reported that unacceptable delays in convening permanence panel meetings are caused by the looked after children review process taking precedence over management and quality assurance processes. This can result in delays in resources being agreed and placements being made.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	inadequate
Capacity for improvement	inadequate
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	inadequate
Quality of provision	inadequate
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	adequate
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	inadequate
Leadership and management	inadequate
Performance management and quality assurance	inadequate
Partnership working	inadequate
Equality and diversity	adequate
Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	adequate
Capacity for improvement	adequate
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Being healthy	good
Staying safe	adequate
Enjoying and achieving	adequate
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	good
Economic well-being	adequate
Quality of provision	adequate
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	adequate
Leadership and management	adequate
Performance management and quality assurance	adequate
Equality and diversity	adequate