

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection dates: 12 June to 6 July 2017

Report published: 25 August 2017

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

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

Executive summary

Since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012, services for children have improved at every stage of the child's journey. Good social work practice is now in place across all children's services in Stockport, with some examples of outstanding practice, in particular for those children who need adoption and permanency.

Strategic plans are well aligned and appropriately prioritise vulnerable children. Clear governance arrangements between strategic boards avoid duplication and fragmentation. Service delivery is enhanced by active engagement of partner agencies within a culture of constructive support and challenge. Good commissioning arrangements and workforce development programmes mean that many children and families benefit from effective services.

The director of children's services and the senior leadership team ensure that practice development is informed by research, feedback from children and best practice elsewhere. While the quality of performance management data and auditing activity is variable, senior leaders have a clear understanding of what is happening on the frontline and act quickly when improvement is needed.

Planning to increase capacity has not kept up with demand, leading to social worker and independent reviewing officer (IRO) caseloads being too high. This has an impact on the quality of managerial supervision, which, while regular, does not always evidence sufficient reflection or challenge, and on the recording of decision-making. While the local authority has made improvements in the quality of practice, some of these improvements, such as in the responses to children who go missing from home or care, are very recent and not yet embedded.

Social work practice is consistently strong. Workers know children well, and effective partnership working and a wide range of services, including an extensive range of early-help support, are available to help and protect children. Significant harm is well identified and responded to promptly. However, triage activity at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub (MASSH) is not always timely when contacts are assessed as non-urgent. The quality of assessments is generally good and children's needs are well understood. However, not all of the written plans are specific in identifying key responsible individuals and timescales. The ASPIRE team ensures that children who have complex safeguarding needs, including those at risk of child sexual exploitation, are well managed.

Arrangements for children who have specific additional needs, including those who are at risk of radicalisation and those who are privately fostered, ensure that children are safe. Speedy assessments of young people aged 16 and 17 presenting as homeless lead to timely offers of appropriate accommodation. Some agencies have not promptly notified, or supplied further information to, the designated officer, delaying joint working.

Children come into care appropriately, informed by good collaborative assessments. Effective edge-of-care services help children at risk of family breakdown to remain at home or to be successfully rehabilitated home from care. Children are seen regularly, and seen alone, by social workers they trust, who progress comprehensive plans to

secure their permanence. Children live in homes with dedicated carers who are supported well. Contact arrangements are effective. A small number of children are placed in out-of-borough residential homes. Children in and out of area are supported well to improve or maintain their physical and emotional health and well-being. Most children make good educational progress. Although there is a good children's participation team, further work is needed to develop an independent visitor and advocacy service.

Adoption services are outstanding. Comprehensive processes and skilled social work ensure the early identification and robust monitoring of children for whom adoption may become the plan. Family-finding strategies are creative, well recorded and highly effective in identifying families in a timely way. The search begins early and systematically, and quickly widens. Family finders routinely explore the use of all the potential national options. Profiling and matching is highly developed and shortlisting of families to link with children is sophisticated. Highly effective support is offered for children and adopters, which starts early and develops seamlessly as the adoption process moves forward. This support is high-quality, expert and responsive and is strengthened by a range of tailored training and support. As a result, some children are matched within a matter of days. The local authority is very successful in finding adopters within children's timescales, for children whose needs, experiences and backgrounds can be complex and challenging.

The local authority is a committed corporate parent, ensuring that the support it gives to care leavers continues well into adulthood. Most young people leaving care receive very well-coordinated support and help that assists them in making a successful transition to adulthood. Plans for them are effective and address their individual needs. Care leavers have support to ensure that their health needs are met, and are helped to access adult services. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live. The majority are supported to secure and maintain suitable and safe housing, with a minority living in temporary housing, rather than good-quality supported accommodation. Although increasing numbers of care leavers successfully access education, employment and training, too many do not sustain this engagement and too few enter higher education or apprenticeships. An example of outstanding practice is the commitment to ensure that contact with care leavers is maintained well into their twenties and beyond.

Contents

Executive summary	2
The local authority	5
Information about this local authority area	5
Summary for children and young people	8
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	9
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	15
Leadership, management and governance	24
The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)	29
Executive summary	29
Recommendations	30
Information about this inspection	35

The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates one children's home. It was judged to be good in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements/arrangements for the protection of children was in February 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in February 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since April 2004.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services.
- A new chief executive has been appointed and will come into post in September 2017. The previous chief executive was in post between April 2010 and April 2017.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since July 2016.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 61,507 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Stockport. This is 21% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 16% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 14% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 13% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 13% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British and Mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 9% (the national average is 20%)

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.

- in secondary schools is 7% (the national average is 16%).

Child protection in this area

- At 21 June 2017, 2001 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 1,974 at 31 March 2016.
- At 21 June 2017, 275 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 45 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 190 (31 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 21 June 2017, two children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is the same figure as that at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years before inspection, five serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and two serious case reviews have been completed.
- There were five serious case reviews ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 21 June 2017, 347 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 56 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 295 (47 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.

Of this number:

- 105 (or 30.3%) live outside the local authority area
- 23 live in residential children's homes, of whom 57% live out of the authority area
- No children live in residential special schools³.
- 224 live with foster families, of whom 23.7% live out of the authority area
- 59 live with parents, of whom 20.3% live out of the authority area
- six children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 21 adoptions
 - 20 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 123 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 1.7% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 8 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living

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

- There are no children and young people living in houses of multiple occupation who have ceased to be looked after.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that social worker, and IRO, caseloads are at a reasonable level to support good-quality work.
2. Ensure that frontline managers have the capacity to provide staff with reflective supervision, including challenge when necessary, and that the rationale for decision-making and case progression is clearly recorded.
3. Ensure that all plans for children are clear and reflect the child's timescales for change.
4. Ensure that the designated officer function is understood and embedded across the partnership, so that all allegations against professionals are responded to promptly.
5. Improve the timeliness of triage arrangements, for non-urgent referrals, in the MASSH.
6. Ensure that all children looked after have access to advocacy and independent visitors.
7. Ensure that all care leavers have access to high-quality supported housing that enables them to develop skills to move into adult life effectively.
8. Further develop the support for care leavers who are not in employment education and training, including an extension of the council's apprenticeship scheme.

Summary for children and young people

- Services for children and young people in Stockport are good. This is because the council listens to your views and involves you in developing services especially for those who are being looked after. Everyone is working together to make things better for you.
- When you need extra help, particularly if you do not feel safe, everyone works closely together to make sure that you and your family receive the right sort of help quickly. This means that social workers, police and teachers work well together to make sure that you are safe and well protected. It also means that families get help before problems are too big. However, sometimes things do not happen as quickly as they should – for example, finding out why someone might have run away from home.
- When you have to leave your family, social workers are good at making sure that most of you live in stable, caring foster families and in good children's homes. A few children find that they have to change families too often, but social workers work hard to avoid this. Managers are very good at making sure that you can live locally, near to your school and friends. When it is safe for you to return home, you and your families are helped to do so with lots of support to make it work.
- If you are being looked after by the local authority, you have plenty of help to make sure that you stay healthy, go to the doctor and dentist regularly, and do your best at school. If problems arise, then plans are made, which are reviewed regularly so you can continue to make good progress. Although social workers listen to what you want to happen, you do not always have someone, who is not involved in your care, who can help you to say what you think.
- Those of you who need to live permanently with another family receive excellent and prompt support. This can include those of you who need to be adopted and those who want to remain with their carers past the age of 18.
- Most of you leaving care get the help you need to become successful adults. Social workers and personal advisers develop excellent relationships with you. They work extremely hard to make sure that most of you feel safe and have a pathway plan that is right for you. You told us that, while you understand the recent changes in the range of available support accommodation, it needs to be better. More of you are now attending further education and getting a job, but there are still too many who are not working, going to college or getting an apprenticeship. Personal advisers and social workers stay in touch with nearly everyone and keep in touch for as long as is needed.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children, young people and their families who need help and protection benefit from a good range of services, which helps to ensure that children are safe.</p> <p>An extensive range of early-help services, with effective parenting programmes and a recently established Team Around the School (TAS) approach, identifies and responds to the emerging needs of children. Good multi-agency support is offered to ensure that only those in most need are referred to children’s services. Thresholds are well understood and applied in the MASSH. Children at risk of significant harm are well identified and responded to promptly. Information-gathering arrangements lead to timely strategy discussions and immediate allocation for assessment. In a small number of non-urgent cases, there are delays in gathering further information or ensuring that the MASSH has consent for work. Out-of-hours services are of a high quality and include visits as part of child protection planning arrangements.</p> <p>Social workers in Stockport form trusted relationships with children and their families, through good-quality direct work. Children’s views are sought by the highly regarded children’s participation team and these are integral to the multi-agency work undertaken. The quality of assessments is generally good and children’s needs are well understood. Plans are not always sufficiently detailed and clear on the child’s timescales for change. Well-coordinated core groups and child protection conferences contribute to the protection of children.</p> <p>Children who have complex safeguarding needs, including those at risk of child sexual exploitation, are well managed through the highly-regarded ASPIRE team. Return home interviews for those children who go missing have not been timely and a new ‘Missing Hub’ was being established as this inspection commenced. Although improvements were seen, the new arrangements are yet to be embedded.</p> <p>Arrangements for children who have specific additional needs, including those who are at risk of radicalisation and those who are privately fostered, promote the safety of children. Support to 16- and 17-year-old homeless young people is good. Prompt joint assessments with Stockport Homes ensures young people are offered appropriate accommodation, including being looked after if additional needs are identified.</p> <p>Designated officer (known locally as LADO) capacity has very recently been increased, and in the main the work undertaken is of good quality. Other agencies have not always been prompt in notifying the designated officer or supplying further information.</p>	

Inspection findings

9. Children in Stockport benefit from consistently strong social work practice. Appropriate support and intervention are provided at important stages in children's lives. Social workers know their children and families well. They coordinate partnership working from the point of contact, through assessments, child protection conferences and core group meetings, resulting in the reduction of risk and improving outcomes for children.
10. An ambitious prevention and early-help strategy, informed by a thorough analysis of local need, has led to the commissioning and provision of a good range of universal, targeted and specialist services. These include evidence-based parenting programmes and an infant-parent service providing perinatal support, highly valued by parents. The recent development of a TAS approach in Stockport is beginning to make a positive difference for children and families. Commencing at the start of the 2016/17 academic year, all schools now have an allocated liaison social worker and a 'school age plus' family support worker. This has resulted in children who have more complex needs being assessed and supported in school settings. Early adopter schools are ensuring positive changes for children, with improvements in attendance, reductions in the need for fixed-term exclusions of up to 60%, and fewer contacts with children's services. This good work is underpinned by the adoption of a restorative practice approach across the whole partnership. This involves taking into account a family's strengths as well as their vulnerabilities, ensuring that families understand and take ownership of their role in any decisions that are made.
11. Children are also enabled to remain within their families at times of particular challenge or crisis, through the application of this restorative approach across a range of targeted preventative services provided by the Stockport Families First Team. The Family Group Conference (FGC) service focuses on identifying solutions within the wider family at an early stage of intervention, with an increase in successful outcomes before family situations are beyond repair. Forty-four of 67 FGCs were completed successfully in the six months prior to this inspection, enabling children to remain in their families.
12. The MASSH is an effective single point of contact with children's services. In the vast majority of cases seen by inspectors, thresholds were appropriately applied on initial screening. Social workers in the first response team carry out prompt and thorough information-gathering when child protection concerns are identified. Timely strategy meetings ensure an appropriate response to concerns. When child protection enquiries are necessary, a social worker in the relevant locality social work team is immediately allocated so there is no delay in responding to potential risk to children.
13. However, for some children when child protection concerns are not present, it can take some days to complete initial screening. This is frequently due to gaps in referral information and consent not being gained by partners prior to contacting the MASSH. In some cases, this delays decision-making about whether children may require an assessment of their needs. No children were

seen to be at risk from this. An early-help officer (EHO) identifies an appropriate lead professional when the MASSH identifies that early-help support would best assist children and families. The EHO provides support and advice to those professionals undertaking the early-help assessment. (Recommendation)

14. The out-of-hours service provides an effective and timely response to referrals and concerns outside of normal working hours. The service undertakes planned visits, including 'safe and well' checks for daytime services, and responds to new safeguarding concerns, working effectively with other professionals to keep children safe.
15. Children benefit from the swift transfer of cases from the MASSH to the relevant locality social work team. Timeliness is improving and the quality of social work assessments is generally good. Children's views and wishes are gathered well in the majority of cases, through age-appropriate direct work that informs assessments. Relevant multi-agency information is always sought, supporting analysis and plans. Management oversight and sign-off are present at the conclusion of assessments, appropriately informing next actions. In a small number of cases, issues of diversity could be more clearly identified.
16. Children who have disabilities have thorough assessments, with a clear focus on both the child and their siblings. Disability issues are well recognised and the needs of the other children described well. When safeguarding concerns exist, appropriate decisions are taken to manage risks under child protection procedures to ensure that children are kept safe.
17. There is effective management of children in need through regular Team Around the Child (TAC) multi-agency meetings. Attendance at the meetings by families and partners is good. This ensures that children and their families have support appropriate to meet their need, with effective step-up and step-down decisions, dependent on achieving identified and agreed change.
18. Decisions to make children the subject of a child protection plan are appropriate. At the time of the inspection, 270 children were subject of child protection plans, a 42% increase from the unusually low number of 190 in March 2016. Decisions to make children subject of a child protection plan are appropriate. The increase in particular reflects the growing awareness and response to the effects of domestic abuse on children's outcomes. The well-regarded children's participation team visits all children over the age of seven, and their families, to describe the child protection process. Team members attend with the child, or represent their views at the conference, and afterwards explain the plan. This is a good and highly valued service to inform and support vulnerable children.
19. Children and young people are protected well through regular conferences and core groups, with good levels of multi-agency involvement. These meetings review and update child protection plans well. The co-location of many multi-agency services helps social workers have close working relationships with relevant professionals, to ensure that support is coordinated and leads to positive outcomes for children.

20. When children are on child protection plans, in the vast majority of cases planning and coordinated multi-agency work is well focused on managing and reducing risk. However, not all of the written plans are specific, identifying key responsible individuals and timescales. (Recommendation)
21. For children at risk of sexual exploitation, the ASPIRE (complex safeguarding) team provides a specialist response. The team coordinates well-embedded and effective partnership arrangements. Children at risk from child sexual exploitation are appropriately identified. The risk to children is minimised by up-to-date, thorough risk assessments and comprehensive multi-agency risk management plans. Appropriate intelligence is also shared across the multi-agency group to inform local understanding of high-risk areas to influence disruption activities. Monthly multi-agency sexual exploitation meetings are chaired by an IRO to develop action plans for individual children identified as being at most risk. In all such cases, an ASPIRE social worker is allocated as either lead or co-worker, helping to ensure that all social workers have a good understanding of the risks associated with child sexual exploitation. This results in focused and comprehensive support packages to reduce risk to vulnerable children.
22. There have been gaps in ensuring that children who go missing from home are visited for a return home interview every time they go missing. This primarily concerns those children who go missing regularly and cases in which there are safety plans and multi-agency work in place. The local authority identified this issue, and a new 'Missing Hub' was being established within the MASSH team, in June 2017 as this inspection commenced. Dedicated staff are now in place to ensure that children are offered a return interview. Inspectors saw immediate improvements in the response. However, it is too early to evaluate the sustainability of these changes.
23. Children who are electively home educated benefit from good support and oversight. Parents are encouraged to register with the local authority, and clear guidance is available to parents as to mutual requirements and expectations from the Parents and Schools Support Service. Families who come to the local authority's notice are offered a home visit by the service, which makes enquiries to ensure that children are safe and assesses the quality of provision. The team continues to offer support, advice and guidance to parents while children remain educated at home. Currently, 153 pupils are educated at home. There is good joint working between education, health and children's services to address the needs of children missing education. At the time of the inspection, Stockport is currently investigating the whereabouts of eight children who are missing education. Safeguarding concerns are appropriately investigated, including when there are concerns that families have returned to their country of origin.
24. The risk to children of living within families in which domestic violence is present is understood, well managed and considered in multi-agency forums such as the multi-agency risk assessment conference. Consistent and effective representation from partners means that information and intelligence are shared and acted upon appropriately to ensure that children are protected. A

broad range of evidence-based and well-evaluated services to address domestic abuse are provided under the partnership umbrella of the Alliance for Positive Relationships (APR). Victims and perpetrators are provided with individual and group-based support to seek to prevent the continuation of abusive relationships, and, when necessary, free legal advice and refuge accommodation to ensure children's safety. During 2016, 70 families who received services through the APR had no further reported incidents of domestic abuse within six months of closure.

25. A good range of support is available for adults and young people experiencing the effects and impact of substance misuse. The Mosaic service provides a range of evidence-based therapeutic and support services to children and families. The Think Family programme offers support to substance-misusing parents in a group or one-to-one setting, focusing on the impact of their behaviour on their children. Children of substance-misusing parents can receive weekly therapeutic sessions. Regular evaluation of the service with children and families at the start and end of interventions provides information to measure change over time. Positive change for clients has also been supported through the development of a peer-mentoring scheme. Current and ex-service-users can attend the accredited programme as a stepping stone to accessing further training and employment opportunities.
26. In response to the needs of 16- and 17-year-old young people who present as homeless, there is a clear protocol and well-embedded pathway for joint assessments between social care and Stockport Homes. Prompt joint assessments are done, and when children have additional needs and vulnerabilities they are assessed as to whether they need to be looked after. There is a range of housing options available and no young person is accommodated in unsuitable accommodation, such as bed and breakfast provision. The allocation of a personal adviser to every young person means that they receive a tailored support plan to ensure that risk and support needs are well managed.
27. At the time of the inspection, there were two children identified as living in private fostering arrangements. Good arrangements are in place to support them and to raise awareness in the communities about private fostering.
28. The local authority and its partners have a joint strategy for children who may be at risk of radicalisation. A small number of children are managed through the Channel Panel, which considers all children identified as at risk. Assessments consider the nature and extent of the risk and agree actions to support children, including safeguarding matters, with plans developed to divert young people away from extremist behaviour.
29. There is a well-considered multi-agency strategy to address concerns about female genital mutilation. This has resulted in a small number of assessments and investigations when agencies have identified concerns about children being at risk. At the time of the inspection, there were no children in Stockport being worked with because of concerns about female genital mutilation.

30. In the main, concerns for children as a consequence of allegations against professionals are well managed. The designated officer offers advice and guidance and escalates appropriately to allegation management meetings, which are well attended. However, inspectors saw that not all partners notified the LADO promptly and have not always responded to requests for further information. However, further work is needed with partner agencies to remind them of their responsibilities to share information to ensure that children are safe. (Recommendation)

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Stockport is committed to, and good at, ensuring that children only become looked after when it is in their best interests. Thresholds for entry into care are applied appropriately, and are informed by comprehensive, multi-agency agreed risk assessments.</p> <p>Most children live close to their communities in stable, good-quality homes with dedicated and well-supported foster carers. When children are placed outside the authority, the majority receive the same level of care and support as children placed in the borough.</p> <p>Assessments and care plans are of a good quality and are regularly reviewed. However, the quality of case-recording is inconsistent and limits the usefulness of the available information.</p> <p>The education of children looked after is closely monitored by the virtual school head, and children generally make progress at a similar rate and attain as well as children looked after across England. Most attend a good or better school, and have access to additional education funding to help progression. Children’s physical and emotional health is promoted by a specialist and co-located team of health practitioners.</p> <p>Children only return to the care of their parents following full assessments of risk, and with a well-designed support package. When children remain in care, contact with their families is facilitated well and supervised effectively. Some children looked after are supported by the children’s participation team, but there is insufficient advocacy and there are not enough independent visitors. The response to child sexual exploitation concerns is good. New arrangements for return home interviews for those missing from care were introduced during the course of the inspection but the arrangements are yet to be embedded.</p> <p>When a child’s plan is for adoption, they receive an exemplary service. Assessments of the child’s needs and the suitability of potential adopters is of excellent quality, and subsequent adoptive placements are well supported.</p> <p>Children leaving care are supported well. Their pathway to independence is started sufficiently early and once in leaving care provision they are encouraged to keep engaged with workers to access ongoing assistance if necessary. There have been recent issues on the availability of supported housing accommodation. Further work is also needed to improve support for educational achievement and work opportunities.</p>	

Inspection findings

31. At the time of the inspection the local authority was looking after 347 children. The number has increased over the past year in line with national and regional trends, from 295 in March 2016. Inspectors looked at this issue in depth and concluded that only those children who needed to be looked after were being accommodated and taken before the courts. Effective, timely and appropriate decision-making results in children only becoming looked after when it is in their best interests. Comprehensive and well-informed assessments also enable senior managers to make informed decisions.
32. Planning for children's permanence is supported by the positive and productive relationship with the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the courts, and a proactive legal service, which ensures that social work teams are well informed of guidance and good practice. The Public Law Outline is used effectively with families to address areas of concern. The clear advice and support on individual cases from the in-house barrister and legal officers, in tandem with briefings, case consultation and training sessions provided to social workers, lead to appropriate proceedings being completed within a 26-week threshold. The quality of assessments, plans and information-sharing by increasingly skilled social workers was identified by Cafcass and the judiciary as a crucial component in minimising delay for children.
33. There is a systematic approach to exploring permanence. A dedicated family finder is allocated for each child. In the 12 months up to March 2017, 17 children had been matched at panel in permanent foster homes. Permanence with independent fostering agency carers is also considered positively. Children's futures have been further secured by a range of orders: 17% of children (26) who left care since April 2016 did so through special guardianship orders, of whom 10% are with former foster carers.
34. Social workers know their children well, and are trusted by them. Inspectors saw many examples of highly effective direct work with children to support understanding of their history, and involving them in the development of their care plans. Particular sensitivity was seen in a number of cases in which social workers adapted tools to respond to the child's level of understanding. The majority of statutory visits are undertaken within timescales, and additional visits are made at times of increasing need or potential risk. When appropriate, children are seen alone. The generic childcare teams are reducing the incidences of children having multiple changes in social worker.
35. Children who are well known to the service have their identity and diversity needs considered appropriately, including sensitive attention being paid to meeting the needs arising from children's unaccompanied asylum seeker status and/or sexuality.
36. The authority has been quick to respond to an increase in placement moves for some children. It recognises the impact on individual children and is fully aware of the reasons behind each move. Weekly tracking meetings, which include IROs and commissioners, interrogate circumstances, which then serve to inform

placement planning, new accommodation initiatives, and specialised foster carer recruitment.

37. Overall, children's care and pathway plans and assessments are detailed, with clear actions and timescales. They are fully discussed at children looked after reviews. Updated actions are agreed with children, and appropriate partners, to progress positive outcomes in all aspects of children's lives. Recording on some children's case files, especially in case summaries and chronologies, could be strengthened to better evidence decision-making and case progression, which is especially important for children wishing to access their care histories in the future. (Recommendation)
38. Arrangements for supporting children looked after placed outside the authority's boundaries are strong. Careful commissioning of placements means that although 30% are deemed to be placed out of area, the majority of those are in very close proximity to Stockport. Appropriate systems are in place to ensure that children placed outside Stockport have timely and suitable arrangements for health and education services, which are monitored to the same standard as those living inside the authority boundaries.
39. Considered, sensitive and wide-ranging efforts are made to secure and manage both direct and indirect contact with children's birth families. Complex contact arrangements are managed well by social workers, and facilitated or supervised by a range of agencies to ensure that they are a quality experience for children.
40. There is much good work identifying and addressing the risks to children looked after when there are concerns about child sexual exploitation. There are appropriate multi-agency strategy meetings to coordinate the work of agencies when there are repeat and increasing concerns. However, in the past year only 60% of return home interviews were offered in a timely manner to those who had gone missing from care. As a response to these issues, the local authority introduced a new 'Missing Hub', which commenced on the first day of the inspection. The team has delivered some improvement in performance in the offer of return home interviews; however, it is too soon for this to demonstrate sustainable improvement.
41. The promotion of the health of children looked after is good, and the authority's recent collaboration with a range of health agencies, including co-location of children's looked after nurses with social work teams, is having a positive impact on performance. The proportion of children having dental checks is improving at 86%, and annual health assessments are completed for 92% of children looked after, including those who are placed out of area. Initial health assessments are completed by a community paediatrician, with the quality overseen by the named nurse for children looked after. Children benefit from a fully engaged and effective team, which adjusts clinic timings and time available to meet the needs and availability of children, carers and occasional interpreters. The majority of children who are looked after who have additional needs relating to their emotional health and well-being receive increasingly effective and timely support. The appointment of a psychologist within the children looked after team is supporting improvements in timeliness of referrals

to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other therapeutic service providers, as well as the consultation offer to social workers and carers.

42. Children looked after generally make educational progress at a similar rate, and attain as well, as children looked after across England. The virtual school team closely monitors the progress of children looked after, and most make better progress than before they became looked after, particularly some of those at the outstanding pupil referral unit and the school for young parents. Achievements in GCSE A*–C in English and mathematics increased from 14.3% in 2014/15 to 22.2% in 2015/16. The proportion of children looked after that attained five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C increased to 28% in 2015/16, from 14.3% in 2014/15. However, the virtual school team and the authority acknowledge the achievement gap between children looked after and other children is still too wide, despite these improvements.
43. Almost all children looked after attend a good or better school. In the very few instances in which this is not the case, the choice of school is made in the best interests of the child. There are clear processes in place for matching children with an appropriate school when they move to a placement outside of the local authority area. Transitions between educational phases, and when a school move is necessary, are well managed with good support for the child. The virtual school team works very effectively with schools as part of the TAS to ensure that barriers to progress are quickly identified and addressed.
44. Children looked after benefit from very good use of additional educational funding to help them make progress and raise their aspirations around areas that interest them. Examples seen by inspectors include singing, piano lessons and horse-riding. Particularly good use is made of funding to improve support in school for children, for example to help increase their resilience, and to address bullying and attachment issues.
45. Children missing from education are quickly identified and those who do not attend regularly are supported well by School Age Plus workers. The local authority maintains clear records of children who do not attend school for at least 25 hours per week and supports them well to continue to learn and return to full-time education. Five of the 16 children who are currently in that category are between schools following a placement move, and seven have needs that require reduced timetables. There are a further six children who access alternative provision for at least part of their timetable and these pupils are making good progress.
46. The quality of personal educational plans (PEPs) has improved in the last two years and these show good involvement of all agencies involved with the child. The vast majority of files seen by inspectors were good. Weaker PEPs are characterised by insufficient analysis of the child's needs, incomplete sections and targets that are not sufficiently clear.
47. The local authority fostering service is responsive and valued by carers, and meets the needs of children well. Fostering recruitment is sharply targeted and based on a well-informed understanding of children's needs and gaps in

resources. A recent campaign to secure 15 carer households for older teenagers and sibling groups has been successful. The local authority fostering service works closely with local independent fostering agencies to ensure that children are placed within Stockport or nearby to better support family contact

48. The range of resources available to meet needs is sufficient. Many carers offer placements for brothers and sisters, and a significant number offer staying put arrangements beyond the age of 18. This has resulted in 13 of the 22 children who have reached 18 most recently having had confirmation of a staying put arrangement to support improved outcomes and learning opportunities.
49. Foster carers benefit from good initial training, with specific themed training, such as intensive therapeutic parenting courses, which are also made available to connected persons. They are supported by the authority to enable children in their care to have good access to a range of leisure activities, and have individualised delegated authority to make appropriate day-to-day decisions to normalise children's experiences. Support and training to foster carers and children in placement are given high priority by the supervising social workers. Carers are further supported by the provision of evening and weekend support of fostering outreach workers.
50. Stockport's IROs also chair child protection conferences, pathway plan reviews and a limited number of TAC meetings. They have high caseloads of around 125 each, although only approximately 50 of these are children looked after. Children looked after reviews are generally timely, with approximately 94% held within timescales. Children are well supported to participate in their reviews by carers, learning mentors and the Mosaic team. When children's care plans or actions agreed at review are not being progressed quickly enough by relevant agencies, IROs make good and effective use of the escalation process to secure compliance. (Recommendation)
51. Children who are looked after currently have limited access to advocacy and independent visitors. Although children who met with inspectors indicated that their social workers advocate well on their behalf, their ability to challenge the care or support they receive is compromised by a lack of advocacy and by insufficient independent visitor services. (Recommendation)
52. Stockport's Children in Care Council (CiCC) has completed valuable work to improve the quality of service that children receive. Examples include involvement in social worker and team manager interviewing panels, the redesign of leaflets about the Pledge for young people, and the development of training and awareness-raising regarding bullying and transgender issues for carers and schools.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is outstanding

53. The local authority is outstanding in ensuring that adoption is pursued vigorously as a permanence option for all children who need it. This begins with scrupulous scrutiny of information about children entering care. Once identified, meticulous and frequent monitoring of the adoption tracker and the allocation of a dedicated family finder ensure that the service knows exactly where each child is up to on their potential adoption journey.
54. Managers continuously scrutinise the timeliness of plans, explore the impact on children of any delays and rigorously challenge why these occurred. The learning gathered continues to be used exceptionally well to avoid and minimise delay, and is embedded in the practice expectations of the service. This has created a tangible sense of urgency for children to live with their adoptive family as soon as possible.
55. Family-finding strategies are creative, well recorded and highly effective in identifying families in a timely way. Profiling and matching are highly developed, and sophisticated shortlisting techniques support the effective identification of the adopters most likely to meet the child's needs. Stockport is the lead agency of Adoption Counts, a regional adoption agency. Through this, very good use is made of collaboration and networking with other regional and national adoption agencies.
56. Searches begin early and systematically and quickly widen across the country. As a result of this embedded, high-quality practice, some children have been matched within a matter of days of the Placement Order being granted. Among the children that the local authority places each year, there is increasing success in finding adopters within the child's timescales for the significant numbers of older children, brothers and sisters, children who have specific cultural needs, and children who have complex health needs and uncertain prognoses.
57. In the period 2016–17, 22 children were adopted. This included five brother and sister groups with children up to the age of nine. Most children, though not all, were White British, which reflects the local community. In the last 12 months there have been a small number of cases in which the local authority has been unable to achieve an adoption placement in line with government timescales. In these cases, the service's strong commitment, tenacity and persistence in achieving adoption was the right plan for those children, despite taking longer than usual.
58. The local authority ensures that children have the opportunity to form secure attachments with their adoptive families quickly by the proactive and carefully considered use of concurrent placements and fostering to adopt. Four children are placed in concurrent placements specifically commissioned from a local

Voluntary Adoption Agency, and a further 12 children have benefitted from fostering to adopt since 2014.

59. Adoption recruitment is focused on attracting people who can meet the identified needs of Stockport's children. Eighteen adoptive families were approved in the last 12 months and the vast majority have had placements. This illustrates how effective and targeted recruitment can attract suitable adopters who can best meet children's needs. Enquirers who are unable to consider, or meet, those identified needs are dealt with sensitively. The rigorous monitoring of timeliness of adopters' approvals has successfully reduced avoidable delays within the local authority's control.
60. Preparation training and assessments are of a high standard. Prospective adopter's reports (PARs) are well written, child-focused and analytical, and capture well what adopters can offer. Adopters who met inspectors were unanimously very positive about the service from first contact to beyond the adoption order. They said that assessments were thorough, in depth, probing and sensitive. Adopters talked about good access to training post-placement and excellent ongoing support.
61. The panel chair and agency decision-maker commented on the high quality and child focus of all assessment and matching work presented to them. Inspectors saw adoption panel members providing good, informed challenge, including deferring for additional work when they deemed this necessary.
62. Skilled social work support and advice for adopters are prioritised from the start to ensure the stability of placements. Due to the use of research, and learning from children's and adopters' experiences, adoption support plans are comprehensive and regularly reviewed. In addition to the excellent social work support, there is easy access to a wide range of tailored training and support groups, and good use of the Adoption Support Fund.
63. There is very good support for birth parents to meet adopters after the adoption order is granted. Over the last year, the access to birth records service has provided specialist counselling for 25 adopted adults about their adoption. Over 200 arrangements are currently coordinated by the Letterbox service. This includes the service supporting a group of birth mothers whose children had been placed for adoption to set up the excellent Cameo group. Recently the women applied for funding to make a film to share with adopters about their experiences and the importance to them of ongoing information and contact.

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

64. Provision for care leavers is good. Most young people leaving care receive very well-coordinated support from a one-stop shop at the Grand Central retail and leisure complex that enables them to move successfully into adulthood. Care leavers enjoy stable and enduring relationships with staff and carers who meet their needs, and contact is maintained well into their twenties. The vast majority feel safe and secure in suitable and safe housing that includes staying put with their foster carers or becoming successful tenants in their own properties.
65. Staff and managers are extremely effective at keeping in touch with young people, especially in trying to maintain contact even with those who are more difficult to engage. Staff are relentless in their work to create a good network of support for young people to improve the quality of their lives and provide the help they need. Intensive support workers provide valued additional support, including in the evenings and weekends, for care leavers who need more help in moving to independence.
66. Joint pathway planning between social workers and personal advisers is effective. Risks are identified well and are responded to effectively, including referral to relevant support agencies, such as Aspire. The majority of pathway plans are comprehensive and reviewed regularly, and most are used well to help young people to focus on their next steps.
67. Very effective collaborative working with housing, health, benefits and the voluntary sector results in care leavers having easier access to services to meet their needs. Staff from these agencies spend time at the one-stop shop, which means that discussions and referrals happen quickly and avoid delays in support for care leavers.
68. Care leavers generally enjoy good access to health services. Close liaison between care leaving staff and the looked after children nurse helps young people to usually receive prompt healthcare. Care leavers can access their health information and this is transferred to their general practitioner. Young people are being consulted about a forthcoming health passport, but this is not currently available. A small number of relevant care leavers take up the option of a 'health MOT'. Although access to adult mental health services can be a challenge, the mental health practitioner, who works from the one-stop shop, helps care leavers to access services more rapidly.
69. Almost all care leavers are in suitable accommodation, including supported housing and sole tenancies through Stockport Homes. Fortnightly panel meetings ensure a good oversight of care leavers' accommodation. A very small number are in custody and therefore deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation; all have plans in place for accommodation on release. Increasing numbers of care leavers stay put with their former foster carers;

currently this comprises 28 young people. No care leaver is in bed and breakfast accommodation. The recent closure of a number of properties has resulted in too many care leavers with greater support needs being housed in temporary support accommodation, without access to on-site support that was previously available. Care leavers who met inspectors acknowledged the circumstances, but raised the quality of the supportive accommodation as an issue for them. (Recommendation)

70. Stockport is a good corporate parent that is aspirational for its care leavers. The authority is increasingly listening to them, including keeping contact well beyond the age of 28, for example through celebratory cards and providing access to support. Care leavers are involved in the CiCC. A voluntary organisation also runs 'have your say' groups to gather care leavers' views to further improve services.
71. The care leavers' team has a strong focus on raising the aspirations, self-esteem and confidence of young people. Celebrations and other events are enjoyed by many care leavers and staff, including outings and dances. A voluntary organisation offers support through Café Zest, a drop-in centre that includes health support and guidance from high-quality volunteers. Thirty-eight young people are also matched with well-trained mentors who support them with confidence-building and access to leisure and other activities, such as interviews.
72. All young people in Stockport who are not engaged in education or employment, including care leavers, have a range of support, including a dedicated worker and access to pre-employment workshops with financial incentives to attend. Increasing percentages of children looked after and care leavers are engaged in employment or education, with over 95% participation at age 16 and 17. Across all ages, 58% of care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training, an increase from previous years but much lower than Stockport's overall figure for young people of 81%. Too few young people are taking part in the supported apprenticeship scheme offered to young people in care and care leavers. Those young people who do enter the apprenticeship scheme are supported well to succeed by understanding managers with flexibility in attendance when needed, such as part-time for a young mother. Supported internships are enjoyed by a small number of young people with a learning difficulty or disability. Progression to higher education is relatively low for Stockport care leavers, currently at 8% of the care leavers. (Recommendation)
73. Care leavers are clear about their entitlements, with personal advisers ensuring that they have their passport, driving licence and national insurance numbers. Many care leavers take up the free driving lessons available to them. All young people who have been in the care of Stockport have access to a leisure pass, which they report as being very helpful in supporting them with healthy activities.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>In the last two years, the local authority has spearheaded an ambitious programme of cultural and structural transformation of how agencies work with children and families, known as Stockport Family. It is based on a clear strategic vision of improving outcomes for vulnerable children through restorative practice. While it is too early to evaluate in full the difference the model is making, since the local authority was last inspected in 2012, services for children have improved at every stage of the child’s journey, despite increased demand.</p> <p>Plans across all strategic boards, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, are well aligned based on shared priorities agreed by the Children’s Trust. Clear governance arrangements avoid duplication and fragmentation. Strategic planning is well informed by a detailed understanding of local need, and good commissioning arrangements mean that many children and families benefit from high-quality effective social work practice and services.</p> <p>The DCS and his senior leadership team ensure that practice development is informed by research, feedback from children and best practice elsewhere. They are proactive in promoting improvements within Stockport and the region. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of what is happening on the frontline and act quickly when improvement is needed. The local authority knows itself well and has identified further improvements that can be made in its performance management and quality assurance. At present, the quality of performance management data is variable and lacks analysis. While the local authority routinely audits casework as part of its quality assurance of practice, some auditors are overly positive and this does not support staff development.</p> <p>Staff are enthusiastic about their work and are highly committed. However, social work and IRO caseloads are too high and action taken to increase capacity has not yet matched demand for services. Due to time pressures, supervision of social workers, while regular, does not always include sufficient reflection or challenge.</p> <p>The local authority has made some significant improvements in the quality of practice, such as its response to children who go missing. These changes are very recent and their effectiveness is yet to demonstrate sustainability.</p> <p>The local authority is a committed corporate parent, ensuring that children looked after receive effective support into adulthood and beyond. Elected members would benefit from greater awareness of local and national initiatives.</p>	

Inspection findings

74. The quality of social work practice, and the services children receive, have significantly improved since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers are now good. Services for children in need of adoption are outstanding. In the last two years the local authority and partners have embarked on an ambitious programme of cultural and structural transformation known as Stockport Family. The changes are based on sound principles of children only needing to tell their story once, and a restorative approach to working with families to be shared across agencies. The programme is currently in the second year of a five-year plan, and there is more to be done to embed the model across all agencies. While it is too soon to evaluate the discrete difference the model is making in improving outcomes for children, the structural changes have resulted in children remaining with social workers and children's locality teams who know them well, and who are tenacious in promoting their welfare.
75. The needs of vulnerable children and families are appropriately prioritised within Stockport Council. This is reflected in strategic planning that is coherent and well aligned to priorities set by the Children's Trust. Clear governance arrangements between the trust and other strategic boards avoid duplication and fragmentation. Scrutiny of progress and service delivery is enhanced by active engagement of partner agencies within a culture of constructive support and challenge.
76. The interim chief executive and the lead member meet regularly with the senior leaders in children's services. Cross-party political support for the Stockport Family model is strong, recognising that it will not deliver the improvements anticipated immediately. The council has recently agreed additional support, through the release of cash reserves, to increase staffing due to a greater demand for services. This demonstrates a council-wide commitment to ensuring that the current good quality of services to vulnerable children and families is maintained and built upon at a time of financial austerity.
77. Partnership arrangements are increasingly effective in promoting joint working. Co-location of some partners within the MASSH and with locality teams has evident benefits in promoting effective information-gathering and developing a shared understanding of complex cases. The local authority has made significant investment in training partner agencies. Additional support to schools through social work link workers, and direct work provided by School Age Plus workers, is increasing capacity and confidence within education facilities to provide children with appropriate early-help support using restorative approaches.
78. Stockport's commissioning of services is well informed by a detailed understanding of local need set out in its joint strategic needs assessment. Effective commissioning practices ensure value for money from high-quality services that are demonstrably improving outcomes for children and care leavers.

79. The role of the Health and Wellbeing Board in overseeing joint commissioning arrangements has been limited. While an external review of its effectiveness has recently been completed, proposed changes are yet to be agreed. Nevertheless, joint commissioning arrangements between children's social care and health are moving towards greater integration at a pace. Rigorous analysis of patterns and trends across agencies, overseen by the Children's Trust, is enabling partners to reconfigure services to be more responsive to children's needs. For example, plans are in place for an outreach CAMHS service delivered to the areas of most need.
80. The DCS and the senior leadership team are proactive in seeking opportunities to learn from others and to disseminate good practice both within Stockport and within the region. Recent activities include peer reviews, collaboration with other local authorities, and membership of initiatives to improve practice through learning based on the experience of children and young people. The local authority is an active participant in regional and national forums to improve the quality of social work training and practice. This includes strong links regionally with local universities through the teaching partnership, participation in research and collaboration with the national social work leadership board. Learning is regularly shared with staff, engendering a culture of continuous improvement.
81. There is good dissemination of learning from complaints. The children's participation team supports children in need and children looked after to raise issues and make complaints if unresolved. The use of the 'respond' system identifies the key learning from cases, makes managers aware and monitors that this has been actioned. The wider learning is disseminated to further improve performance.
82. The local authority's workforce strategy is well informed by market forces, and staff have access to a good range of opportunities for career progression and personal development. Like many authorities, Stockport mostly recruits newly qualified staff. It is committed to developing staff through provision of a range of good external and internal training. Pathways for staff progression, from recently qualified social workers to supporting future leaders, are clear and well promoted. Training includes the learning from quality assurance of casework. The local authority recognises that its current evaluation of training is too dependent on self-reporting on the day, and it is in the early stages of supplementing it through themed auditing activity.
83. While there has been some recent turnover of staff and movement within the organisation through internal promotion and development opportunities, staff turnover remains lower than comparators. However, the current capacity of the workforce to meet an increased demand for services is overstretched. Casework has become increasingly complex, and there has been an increase in numbers of children subject to a child protection plan and becoming looked after. Forward planning to create additional posts has not been sufficient to meet the demand. While the local authority is in the process of recruiting an additional specialist team to work with children who have highly complex needs to increase capacity, social work caseloads, including those for newly qualified

workers, are too high. Inspectors have not identified any unsafe practice due to these demands and most practice seen is good. However, some staff report increasing detriment to their work–life balance and some struggle to access training. (Recommendation)

84. Managers and social workers are based in the same offices and there are evident regular and purposeful conversations about casework. While formal supervision and managerial oversight are also regular, both are often brief and lacking reflection and, when necessary, challenge. Some records of decision-making would not help children to understand the reasons decisions were made if they choose to access their records in later life. (Recommendation)
85. The effectiveness of performance management information, in supporting the local authority's understanding of frontline practice, is variable. While the local authority has a wealth of generally accurate performance management information and the performance dashboard used in locality teams provides useful 'live' information, it is not sufficiently comprehensive or detailed to support oversight of practice within all parts of the service. Managers within the MASSH and within the early-help service cannot easily measure the timeliness of services children receive. While regular performance management meetings are held, these are often focused on process and do not explore underlying causation for emerging themes. Written analysis of performance management data to form hypotheses and identify underlying trends is largely absent. The local authority is taking action to increase capacity to support analysis and to include all services in the performance dashboard. However, at the point of the inspection, interpretation of data is too dependent on the individual expertise of managers at all levels in the organisation and of elected members.
86. The local authority has an established comprehensive cycle of quality assurance and review. While findings from routine quality assurance replicate many of the inspectors' findings, the quality of the local authority's auditing during the inspection was variable, with a minority of audits overoptimistic in their evaluation of practice. This can give the wrong messages to staff about expected standards. The local authority recognises that the right balance between supporting staff at a time of increased pressure and ensuring that consistency of expectation has not always been achieved. It is reviewing its auditing practice following findings from this inspection.
87. Case auditing is supplemented by a wide range of other quality assurance activity, such as observations of practice and mapping of children's experiences. As a result, most of the areas of development identified through this inspection were known to senior leaders, with action planned, or already taken, to support practice improvement.
88. The local authority is a committed and active corporate parent. Staff and elected members take their responsibilities as a corporate parent seriously. The local authority recognises that a good parent's support of their children does not stop at age 21. Care leavers can continue to receive support from an effective commissioned service throughout their lives, and the local authority maintains links with care leavers still further by communication with them

through birthday cards and newsletters. This gives care leavers an important message that the local authority is still there as a source of support should they require it in later life. Children's participation to inform practice improvement is well established in Stockport at a casework and strategic level. The small but dynamic CiCC is regularly consulted and its views valued and acted upon. Improvements, as a result of children's participation, include training for professionals on gender and sexuality, by young people themselves, and children's recent involvement in interview panels for staff. Children looked after and care leavers' achievements are celebrated in an annual awards ceremony, which is well attended by members of the corporate parenting working party, who are justifiably proud of what children looked after have accomplished. However, elected members, who are part of this group, would benefit from a more detailed understanding of regional and national initiatives to spur on the council-wide ambition for children looked after and care leavers.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board requires improvement to be good

Executive summary

The Stockport Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) is on a journey of improvement following a period when board members described it as weak. There is good awareness of the work undertaken so far and the developments still needed. The new independent chair has brought increased focus, drive and challenge. Priorities and structures have been reviewed and, where possible, the board has looked at ways of jointly approaching safeguarding activity. This includes shared high-quality policies and procedures with other local authorities in Greater Manchester, merging of some subgroups with the Adult Safeguarding Board, and a joint child death overview panel (CDOP) with two other authorities.

There is good attendance at the main board. However, there is still insufficient partner contribution at some subgroups and at training events. Financial contributions by partner agencies have not increased over the last six years, apart from that by children's services.

Governance arrangements are appropriate. Although the board demonstrates some influence in informing other strategic bodies, there is still work to do in shaping the work with the Health and Wellbeing Board. Serious case reviews (SCRs) are carefully considered and appropriately initiated, with effective dissemination of learning. However, not all actions have been completed in a timely manner.

There is effective oversight and action in some areas of its work, but the SSCB needs to further improve its monitoring and evaluation of frontline practice. Performance data is too broad and does not provide a clear picture of children's experiences. Quality assurance activity is too reliant on single-agency audits, limiting the board's ability to identify local issues to inform priorities that will improve multi-agency practice and hold partners to account.

The board ensures that there is sufficient high-quality training, and a commissioned evaluation showed that partners found the learning useful. The board has recently started to evaluate the impact of training on frontline practice.

A strength of the board is its understanding of children vulnerable to child sexual exploitation, and of those who go missing, through their detailed problem profile, the clear strategies which drive this work, and the challenge made to partner agencies, which has recently improved missing children return home interviews.

Recommendations

- Review partners' contribution to the board to ensure that the SSCB is appropriately resourced.
- Improve the coordination of work with other strategic bodies.
- Ensure that there are focused priorities for the SSCB, which can be actioned and measured to improve outcomes for children and their families.
- Ensure that recommendations from SCRs are clear, with responsibilities and timescales identified.
- Ensure that multi-agency audits are regular and focused on improving practice.
- Improve the focus and analysis of key performance data.

Inspection findings

89. The SSCB meets its statutory responsibilities. It is independently chaired with appropriate membership of sufficiently senior managers to enable key decisions to be made. Governance arrangements are clear and appropriate, with the independent chair meeting quarterly with senior managers and leaders through the well-established safeguarding accountabilities meetings. This ensures that the board is held to account for meeting its statutory responsibilities, and provides a platform for the safeguarding board to challenge partners.
90. Since the appointment of the new independent chair in July 2016, activity has been appropriate and purposeful to improve the board and address previous weaknesses. The strategy is to align the work of the Safeguarding Children Board with the Adult Safeguarding Board (ASB) as part of a shared ambition to provide a 'life-course approach across safeguarding'. The aims are to break down age barriers in accessing services, provide a family approach to safeguarding, and maximise board and partner resources. Priorities have been agreed through a joint development day, and restructuring of subgroups is being progressed. This includes merging of training, early-help and communication subgroups, while establishing complex safeguarding and domestic abuse groups. Appropriate business processes are now in place, with formal reporting from each subgroup to the implementation subgroup on progress against each of the priorities.
91. The board has four shared priorities with the ASB. These are ambitious but very broad. For example, one of the priorities is to improve transitions that children experience. Partners recognise that this is a huge task. The three-year business

- plan is detailed but could be improved by clarifying what the measurable impact will be for children. (Recommendation)
92. Aspects of partnership contribution need to be reviewed. Although there is strong commitment to the main board, there are a number of areas where this needs to improve – for example, attendance at some subgroups and at safeguarding training is weak. Financial contributions have not increased over the last six years, with the exception of social care. (Recommendation)
 93. The board monitors and scrutinises partners’ effectiveness in delivering their safeguarding responsibilities. Agencies produce a report under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 on a two-year rolling cycle. These reports are moderated through the quality assurance and performance management subgroup providing appropriate challenge and, if necessary, actions to be completed to improve practice. The board has recently reviewed and improved its section 11 audit form and processes to ensure that it aligns with work across Greater Manchester. This prevents duplication of work for partners and includes the voice of children as part of the evaluation.
 94. The SSCB has not yet forged strong enough links with the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) for it to assert its influence. The independent chair sits on the Children’s Trust and has a shared agenda with other strategic bodies, including the Safer Stockport Partnership (SSP), who share domestic abuse as a priority, and the Children’s Trust in its work on transitions. The board has memorandums of understanding in place with the HWB, the SSP and the ASB but recognises that this is also needed with the Children’s Trust to capitalise on the work of each board in improving safeguarding for children. (Recommendation)
 95. SSCB policies and procedures are of high quality and readily accessible on the safeguarding board website. The board has adopted the Greater Manchester safeguarding procedures, while maintaining specific locally derived guidance. This maximises skills, knowledge, resources and learning, and provides a clear basis for ensuring consistency of services for children across these authorities. The Stockport policy and practice subgroup focuses appropriately on localising national guidance, including in the areas of female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and neglect, to ensure that these reflect local needs, pathways and services.
 96. The training subgroup is effective and ensures that there is sufficient high-quality training that meets partners’ needs. An experienced full-time training manager uses the learning from section 11 audits to identify training needs of partners and, when necessary, provides bespoke training to meet that need. The subgroup has developed a useful training matrix for practitioners working with children to help identify what safeguarding training they need based on their job. The training manager has developed specific safeguarding packs for partners to deliver, and has observed the training to ensure that it is of high quality, which is good practice.
 97. The board provides training that is flexible to meet practitioners’ needs and provides e-learning, classroom-based training opportunities and the use of

learning circles to broaden its reach. For example, the board has made a video for agencies to disseminate learning from SCRs in identifying significant harm with babies. A pool of experienced staff drawn from across the partnership supports delivery of face-to-face learning. However, the number of partner trainers is reducing, and overall partner attendance is poor, at approximately 70%, resulting in a number of events being cancelled. This has been escalated through to the main board, resulting in the implementation of a charging policy for non-attenders.

98. The board has prioritised its evaluation of training on lessons learned from SCRs, including the role of men within the home and disguised compliance. An independently commissioned evaluation showed that agencies found the training useful and impactful. The board has recently moved to an electronic booking system, which will automatically request feedback from practitioners attending all SSCB training. However, this is in its infancy and it is too early to determine its impact.
99. The learning and improvement panel carefully considers information provided by partners and appropriately initiates an SCR when criteria are met. There are five completed reviews with action plans being progressed and one review in progress. Themes from these reviews are identified effectively and collated into a single multi-agency implementation plan. The quality assurance and performance management subgroup holds partners to account against each theme. This includes additional scrutiny and challenge through moderation sessions. This is good practice. The learning from SCRs is distributed effectively through a multifaceted approach, including seven-minute briefings, large-scale events, themed training and multi-agency learning circles. Inspectors found that most of the social workers spoken to as part of the inspection of children's services were aware of the SCRs and could articulate the lessons learned from the reviews.
100. The vast majority of the SCRs pre-date the appointment of the new independent chair and the improvements made to the workings of the board. Since the last Ofsted inspection, the quality of SCR reports has not been consistently good, with recommendations and action plans that are not specific and are difficult to progress. Agencies have taken timely corrective action as practice deficiencies have been identified, and all partners are held to account for all practice themes identified through the multi-agency implementation plan. However, as a result of a lack of specific and clear recommendations, partners experienced difficulties keeping to original timescales and deadlines.
(Recommendation)
101. The work of the CDOP is effective. The panel is shared with Tameside and Trafford, and is chaired independently, with effective communication supported by the independent CDOP manager. The annual report for 2015–16 provides clear information concerning notifications received and closed down, and identifies themes. A core group of experienced professionals, who review all child deaths through well-established systems, supports CDOP. The panel identifies core themes for individual localities as well as across Greater Manchester, and disseminates lessons learned through training delivered by the

manager. Cross-cutting themes, such as infant mortality, have led to the development of a sector-led improvement programme overseen by public health. Local themes, such as safe sleeping, have led to tangible actions, including working in partnership with a national supermarket chain to enable parents to purchase cots at cost price and radio campaigns to raise the profile of safe sleeping.

102. The quality assurance and improvement framework is clear and concise, detailing the interrelationships between each quality assurance function. However, multi-agency auditing is not yet embedded in the work of the board. The SSCB is heavily reliant on single-agency audits as the main source of information on safeguarding practice. Given the board's limited resources and capacity, the priority has focused on testing corrective actions and learning from the SCRs. For example, health partners audited their response to the 'journey of the child' for children under the age of one to test whether vulnerabilities and safeguarding concerns are identified at the earliest opportunity. The board has reviewed other multi-agency audits. For example, those completed by the Children's Trust focusing on safeguarding families have been presented to the quality and performance management subgroup. (Recommendation)
103. Performance information is too broad, with 90 items of data captured. It does not provide a concise picture of children's safeguarding experiences, services provided or their outcomes. The board receives extensive information from partners, but the way in which it is presented means that it is difficult to identify trends and themes. The board has recognised this issue and the dataset is currently being reviewed. (Recommendation)
104. Through the performance information, the board recognised that the timeliness of return home interviews for children missing was a concern. This led to formal challenge and the unlocking of additional resources to improve services for these vulnerable children. The new 'Missing Hub' commenced during the inspection.
105. A clear strength of the SSCB is its coordination of partners to tackle child sexual exploitation and children who go missing. The board understands the nature and extent of children at risk of child sexual exploitation and those who go missing from home and care through detailed problem profiles, which inform their multi-agency child sexual exploitation and missing strategies. Targeted work includes campaigns to raise the profile of these issues, including 'child sexual exploitation awareness week', a week dedicated to engaging children and young people, communities and wider partners in recognising concerns. Other developments include the implementation of a risk matrix to help schools identify concerns, and the establishment of a residential provider forum to raise awareness of these issues with external providers when children are placed in Stockport.
106. The board has also begun to improve its oversight of specific complex safeguarding issues, including female genital mutilation, trafficked children and gangs, though its newly established complex safeguarding subgroup.

107. The most recent published annual report, 2015–16, identifies the work of the board and its subgroups over the last year and provides some information on impact against its key priorities. The report successfully highlights further areas of development, with risks identified, including partners' attendance at subgroups, quality assurance and a lack of data analysis, but does not sufficiently detail the impact the board has had on partners in improving the lives of children and young people. For instance, the report presents the data about the work of the designated officer, private fostering and young carers but has limited evaluation of this work. The SSCB has identified the further improvements necessary for the 2016–17 annual report, which is currently being prepared.

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

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

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 five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and two additional inspectors.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Neil Penswick

Deputy lead inspector: Shirley Bailey

Team inspectors: John Roughton, Stella Elliott, Judith Nelson, Kath Townsley, Lisa Summers

Senior data analyst: Clare Atkinson

Quality assurance manager: Christine Williams

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD
T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk
© Crown copyright 2017