

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

Wiltshire Council

Inspection dates: 8 – 17 July 2013
Lead inspector Ian Young HMI

Age group: All

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Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

2. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Wiltshire is judged to be **adequate**.

Areas for improvement

3. In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Wiltshire, the council and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- Strengthen planning arrangements for children assessed by social workers as being in need, so that a detailed plan is in place for each eligible child, with clear measurable outcomes.

Within three months:

- Put in place a performance framework for the Principal Social Workers that includes clear criteria for their success in improving services to children
- improve the way in which the wishes and feelings of children and young people are identified and recorded to inform both individual assessments of need and strategic plans
- develop a localised pre-birth protocol and ensure that it is fully understood and implemented across the partnership
- improve private fostering arrangements so that all eligible children are identified promptly and receive a timely assessment of their needs.

Within six months:

- Embed the recently introduced single assessment process so that every eligible child experiences the consistent completion of a timely and thorough assessment
- improve multi-agency support for the Common Assessment Framework so that professionals are confident that the support they offer is protecting children, and the need to rerefer to social care is reduced
- improve partners' ability to identify and assess emerging risk to children who are suffering from chronic patterns of abuse or neglect, and to progress plans to secure their safety.

About this inspection

4. This inspection was unannounced.
5. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. Inspectors have scrutinised case files, observed practice and discussed the help and protection given to these children and young people with social workers, managers and other professionals including members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Wherever possible, they have talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have analysed performance data, reports and management information that the local authority holds to inform its work with children and young people.
6. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.
7. The inspection team consisted of five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one seconded inspector.
8. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

9. Wiltshire has approximately 114,000 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 24.6% of the total population. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below the national average.
10. Wiltshire has 234 schools comprising 199 primary schools (19 of which are academies), 29 secondary schools (20 of which are academies) and 6 special schools (one of which is an academy). Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 8.2% of the total population, compared with 25.4% in the country as a whole. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national figure.
11. Wiltshire is a large rural county with one of the highest military populations in the country. In 2013, 8% (5122) of the school population came from military families.
12. Wiltshire has a low level of child poverty with an estimated 12% of children living in poverty. Whilst Wiltshire is generally less deprived than England as a whole, the county has seen an increase in relative

deprivation and in 2010, for the first time, had one Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in the 10% most deprived in England together with other pockets of significant deprivation.

13. Early Years services provision is delivered predominantly through the private and voluntary sector in over 350 settings. There are 650 childminders and 30 children's centres.
14. Early help for children and families in Wiltshire is provided through a combination of direct and commissioned services, together with partner agencies. Intensive family and parenting support services are accessed through a Gateway Panel, chaired by a senior social care manager.
15. At the time of inspection, the local authority has a central referral and assessment team, four community safeguarding teams, two children in care/through care teams, and two child disability teams. However, there are plans to move to a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangement by the beginning of 2014 and restructuring will commence in August to facilitate this. Wiltshire is also a pathfinder for improving services to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and is moving towards a 0-25 year old SEND service.

Overall effectiveness

16. The response of senior leaders within Wiltshire county council and its partners has been swift and effective following an inspection by Ofsted in 2012 which found safeguarding arrangements to be inadequate. Children's services have consequently been the focus of a considerable commitment of additional resources, and this has driven demonstrable improvement in child protection practice. In a large majority of cases seen by inspectors, the assessed need of children and young people for immediate protection was appropriately met. However, there is further work for the council and its partners to ensure that this improved standard of practice is sustainable, delivered consistently, and embedded across the full range of services to children in need.
17. The quality of early intervention services available to families to prevent problems escalating was commented upon positively by the inspection report in 2012. This existing strength has been effectively enhanced by the decommissioning of a diverse range of family support services and their recommissioning into the single Wiltshire Families First service, provided by a national charity. The inception of this service has added further value to a wide range of family support services, which are now available through the clear pathway of the weekly Gateway Panel, chaired by a senior manager. A sharp understanding amongst partners of the basis for intervention in the lives of children and families, is strengthened by the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board's (WSCB) introduction of a jointly-owned and well-understood thresholds document, which clearly identifies levels of need. Where families require a higher level of intervention to keep their children safe, escalation processes were seen by inspectors to be working well in some cases. This occurred particularly where an immediate risk of harm was identified by professionals monitoring families' circumstances. However, this was not consistently in evidence where risks emerged without a readily available trigger point for referral, such as in cases of chronic neglect. Further consideration is also needed by partners of the way that services to families are de-escalated, to ensure that children remain safe without the need to rerefer to social care or put in place a second or subsequent child protection plan.
18. Child protection practice has demonstrably improved since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. Strong out of hours and daytime referral arrangements have been put in place to ensure that children and young people's need for immediate protection is being promptly and effectively met. Strategy meetings convened to co-ordinate enquiries into the safety of children are inclusive of the full range of relevant professionals and are well recorded. The improving quality of child protection plans has been facilitated by the appointment and professional development of a group of designated child protection co-ordinators, who now chair child protection conferences well. However, the delivery of child protection plans is insufficiently supported by the consistent and timely completion of an assessment of children's

needs which accurately records their wishes and feelings, and this can result in drift or in a small number of cases, child protection plans being put, or remaining in place unnecessarily.

19. Where children and young people's need for protection is not immediate, but they nonetheless require both an assessment of their needs and the provision of services by social workers to keep them safe, practice is underdeveloped. The presence of children in need (CiN) plans on children's files is inconsistent and too many are of very poor quality or blank. This was particularly the case where the family's level of need had escalated from the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), and means that the purpose and intended outcomes of the provision of services by social workers to children in need are too often unclear. Where children's identified needs had de-escalated from child protection plans, planning benefits from the intervention of child protection co-ordinators, who make sure that viable succession plans are put in place. Too many cases were seen by inspectors where a timely assessment of emerging risk of harm to children and young people had not taken place. Where vulnerable children and young people require a child protection enquiry, it is of the same satisfactory quality as for any other child. However, the opportunity is not taken for a considered and in depth assessment of vulnerable groups, such as unborn children, children who are privately fostered, and those who are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
20. The prompt and successful delivery of an ambitious improvement plan has been driven by the effective Safeguarding Improvement Board (SIB), which receives a high level of commitment from senior leaders of partner agencies. An impressive level of engagement by elected members is adding value to a clearly articulated vision for the county's children and young people, and to a newly adopted culture of appropriate challenge amongst the senior leadership of the council and its partners. The WSCB has more recently undergone a critical review of its contribution to governance arrangements. Although there are early signs of improvement, it is too early to judge whether its revised membership and structure will lead to a sustained positive impact on multi-agency child protection practice. Arrangements for performance managing and quality assuring child protection work have now been enhanced, and the appointment of designated Principal Social Workers (PSWs) has facilitated an appropriate culture of learning. However, the PSWs do not yet operate to a clearly understood performance framework. Workforce planning is underway on the basis of a workload analysis but, notwithstanding the efforts of the council to recruit experienced, permanent social workers, the service remains heavily reliant on agency staff. This means that children and families do not always have access to an allocated social worker who knows them well.

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers

Adequate

21. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people and their families is adequate. Children and young people at risk of immediate harm are effectively identified by partners including schools, and referred appropriately to social care. When children are identified as being at risk of significant harm, services generally work well together to reduce risk. During the inspection, no cases were identified by inspectors where children and young people were left at unnecessary risk of harm. A small number of cases were brought to the council's attention where tracking by inspectors had identified concerns about the consideration of risk, and the effectiveness of help offered. Senior managers examined those cases thoroughly and acted decisively to assure inspectors that these children were safe.
22. A comprehensive and county-wide offer of early help prevents family difficulties from escalating to higher levels of provision. The 16 local Multi Agency Forums successfully focus on early intervention and prevention, and this has improved the timeliness of access to help for families. Good commitment by professionals facilitates the engagement of families in a wide range of services, such as the county's 30 Children's Centres. When last inspected by Ofsted, most of these Children's Centres were judged good or outstanding in the services they provided to children and families. The Centres have been carefully located in areas of greatest need, are responsive to local requirements and provide good outreach work, which engages and supports families well. Parents receive effective assistance to improve their parenting in situations where domestic abuse has occurred. For example, one young parent spoken to by inspectors said that the service had been 'a lifeline'.
23. Inspectors saw examples where strong multi-agency working through the CAF resulted in significant reduction in identified concerns about the family's functioning, particularly in more recent cases. There are good levels of participation from parents and children in CAFs. For example, one young mother reported that the well co-ordinated support of agencies in a CAF had been invaluable in providing practical support following the birth of her child. However, not enough children benefit from a CAF because of the reluctance of some agencies to take on the role of Lead Professional. In other cases, this reluctance delays or prevents de-escalation from a CiN plan. This can result in cases drifting without a clear purpose, or in their premature closure. The high number of rereferrals to statutory services indicates that the de-escalation to the CAF of children in need has been insufficiently effective in some cases. The council and its partners have not as yet analysed and fully understood the reasons for this pattern of repeat referral.

24. Additional services to support families such as Wiltshire Families First, provide timely, practical, focused help which can meet a wide range of children's needs and are accessible across the county. Children and parents engage well in these services and inspectors saw examples where families are receiving effective support, for instance in establishing more suitable rules and boundaries for their children. Advice offered by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to early intervention services is accessible and valued by them. However, ongoing support from CAMHS to children who have a greater level of need in respect of their emotional wellbeing is not always sufficiently accessible. Where children are identified as children in need, their needs are insufficiently addressed in too many cases because of the poor quality of CiN plans, and this results in unfocused intervention of which the intended outcome is not clear. Inspectors saw too many cases where there was consequent drift and insufficient progress being made in meeting children's identified needs. Fewer children are identified as being in need than in comparator authorities and the reasons for this have not been analysed and are therefore unclear. In some cases seen, due to poor planning for children in need, social workers did not seek additional services for children and young people via the Gateway Panel as they should.
25. When child protection concerns are identified and children and young people are referred to social care, they are effectively safeguarded by a prompt and well-coordinated response. Strategy discussions and meetings show high levels of engagement and information sharing by partner agencies. Children who are the subject of child protection enquiries are consistently seen by social workers to establish their views. In all cases seen by inspectors, the immediate protection offered was of a high standard through appropriate investigation and timely action. However, in a small number of cases seen, where there are concerns that did not reach the threshold of a child protection enquiry, cases were closed prematurely, without sufficient assessment or the offer of a service. For children and young people who are not at immediate risk of harm an unacceptable delay in the completion of assessments has too often resulted in a delay in the provision of services. For example, the absence of a clearly understood pre-birth assessment protocol leads to delay in commencing an assessment of the needs of unborn children and potentially impedes timely action to ensure their safety. In domestic abuse cases, an insufficient number of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors limits the reach and impact of the service.
26. The risks to children are thoroughly considered in child protection conferences, particularly in more recent cases. Inspectors saw examples where children, parents and relatives' views were carefully considered and positively influenced child protection plans. Agencies are fully engaged and share information well to protect children in conferences and core groups. Family Group Conferencing provides a useful additional service to address deep seated family problems, including children and young people

who are the subject of child protection plans. Inspectors saw a number of cases where effective child protection planning resulted in a reduction to risk of harm, and a consequent de-escalation in the level of intervention. However, in a small number of cases, particularly those of long standing, poor quality planning resulted in unfocused intervention and provided insufficient evidence of improved outcomes for children. In a very few child protection cases, children were subject to formal child protection processes that were drifting, without sufficient evidence that this was proportionate to the level of risk or concern.

27. The numbers of children identified as being in private fostering arrangements is broadly in line with similar authorities, but as yet the council and its partners cannot be reasonably assured that children in these situations are consistently well identified and protected. Assessments of children in private fostering arrangements are not always timely or comprehensive, and therefore the council and its partners cannot always be sure that these children are safe.
28. The council and its partners work well together in the Wiltshire Risk Management Group (WRMG) to share information about individual children and young people who are going missing, or who may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Swift action is taken to ensure their immediate safety. This arrangement is working towards a cohesive multi-agency approach to monitoring and planning for individual young people who are highly vulnerable and at high risk. For instance, sharing multi-agency intelligence about activities, situations or issues which suggest that CSE is occurring, has led to some effective action being taken, such as monitoring premises where there are concerns of young people being harboured. However, in follow up work with vulnerable children, risks are as yet insufficiently understood and addressed. For example, arrangements to interview missing young people when they return to their parents are not robust. This deficit has been recognised and acknowledged by the council and its partners, and they have recently appointed a designated worker to improve consistency of practice, although it is too early to assess the impact of this appointment.
29. Children and young people receive a comprehensive range of services that are responsive to their ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability. A good range of services is in place to meet the needs of children with a disability and parents spoken to by inspectors are positive about these. The number of families from minority communities using Wiltshire Families First and the Family Support Service appropriately reflects the broader picture of the community. Individual assessments and intervention generally reflect children's diverse needs well and inspectors saw examples where social workers had carefully considered likely cultural differences as part of their decision making.

The quality of practice

Adequate

30. The quality of practice is adequate. Most contacts and referrals are dealt with promptly by the council's referral and assessment (R&A) service and progress swiftly through the system for children and families to receive services or further assessment. For the few that are not, children's immediate welfare is assured and risk is effectively managed. Decision making and management oversight is clear and in line with the WSCB's thresholds document, which is well understood and owned by partner agencies, who value the consultation offered by social workers about whether to refer children for social work intervention or support through CAF.
31. The council's emergency duty service is effective. It is responsive both to requests from daytime services and to situations arising out of office hours, and it has sufficient experienced staff who work in a pattern that reflects peaks and troughs in demand. The service has the ability to call on extra resources when needed to provide additional social work cover across the full county area. The duty CAF co-ordinator is embedded within the daytime R&A service and appropriately diverts some referrals that do not require a statutory social care service for a multi-agency offer of early help. The quality of most CAFs is reasonable with some strong and very effective interventions that make a positive difference to children's lives. The Wiltshire Families First service is an appropriate addition to the wide range of support services available to families who do not meet the social care threshold, but it is a relatively recently introduced service. It is therefore yet to realise its full potential in meeting children's needs both at an early intervention level, and for those who have been de-escalated from a CiN plan, so that they do not need to be referred or rereferred to social care
32. Most of the council's statutory work with children in need ranges in quality from poor to adequate. Although the council understand this and there are some areas of better practice, particularly where cases have been de-escalated from a children protection plan, a significant number of children in need are still receiving a service that is neither timely nor meeting their needs. Too many plans are missing, of poor quality or have not been adequately progressed. This limits the chances of children having their needs met through the provision of preventative services as children in need, and increases the number of children whose level of need will escalate over time, and is compounded by the fact that, as recorded in the council's own performance data for May 2013, only 42% of recent initial assessments were completed within set timescales. The council and its partners cannot therefore be assured that in many cases below the threshold for a child protection plan, they have a clear understanding of children's needs and an effective plan in place to meet them.

33. The council and its partners have put significant effort and resource into improving the quality of child protection work and this is reflected in a standard of work that is adequate or better in almost all cases. Strategy meetings are generally effective in identifying the need for child protection investigations and involve a wide range of professionals. The co-location of the police child protection referral team within the same office as the R&A service has bolstered this improvement. The council is supporting this improved practice in a number of ways. This includes offering social workers a range of evidence based tools for assessing need and risk, and providing additional services accessed via the weekly Gateway Panel, to undertake specialist assessments and intensive support to families. Where there are immediate serious child protection concerns, these are almost always recognised and addressed promptly. An understanding of the effect on children of chronic patterns of neglect and emotional harm, such as living in homes where there is domestic abuse, is developing, but further improvement is necessary if these children are to be effectively and consistently protected.
34. Child protection practice within the community safeguarding teams is generally of a higher quality than that seen within the assessment service. and longer term assessment of children's needs is therefore variable. Assessments by the safeguarding teams have a clearer analysis of children's circumstances and of what therefore needs to improve. Social workers in all teams are beginning to be helped in their assessments by greater use of chronologies to identify historical patterns of behaviour and need. The council has not consistently used core assessments as the means to carry out and record child protection investigations, and those that have been produced for children at risk of significant harm have not commenced until after an initial child protection case conference. This has delayed sufficiently full assessment of children's needs and the council's own data records poor performance on timeliness. From April to May 2013 only 50% of core assessments were completed within set timescales. From 8 July 2013, initial and core assessments were replaced by a new single assessment format. The council and its partners recognise that the assessment of new referrals and more in-depth assessments should be carried out in a timely manner that matches the circumstances of the individual child or young person. However, it is not yet possible to judge the quality, timeliness and impact of their newly adopted model.
35. Initial and review child protection conferences are chaired effectively by designated child protection coordinators. They deliver a standard agenda which ensures that risks and strengths are appropriately identified and progress reviewed. During conferences, coordinators ensure that outcome-focused plans are agreed and parents are actively involved in shaping them. Child protection coordinators have a quality assurance and challenge role and this function has helped to improve the child focus of plans, leading to improved outcomes for children.

36. Case recording generally reflects children's circumstances well and is clear and up to date in most cases and this aids the monitoring of children's safety so that social workers and their partners can ensure that they are safe. Children are almost always seen both regularly and alone, when this is appropriate. Management oversight and case supervision was clearly seen in case recording by inspectors tracking cases, and shows appropriate guidance and direction to staff, as well as monitoring the progress of agreed plans and actions. Managers provide professional development and reflective discussion to social workers in supervision sessions, and are readily accessible at other times to provide support and guidance.
37. The voice of the child is not always apparent in case recording and assessments. Whilst there is some good practice and the use of advocates to represent the views of children at conferences is a strength, the majority of case recording does not exceed a basic level. Reports and assessments relating to younger children too often state that they are too young to express a view and the behaviour and presentation of these children and interactions based on play, are not being used with any consistency to help to understand their wishes and feelings.

Leadership and governance

Adequate

38. Leadership and governance arrangements are adequate. All senior managers, elected members, and partners interviewed by inspectors identified the adverse findings of Ofsted's last inspection in 2012 as a major impetus for change. An ambitious Improvement Plan (IP) has been put in place, and this identifies appropriate action to improve the safeguarding performance of the council and its partners, including the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB). Full multi-agency sign up to the Safeguarding Improvement Board (SIB) which oversees the implementation of the IP, means that the partnership is making steady progress in successfully implementing strategies to protect children and young people, including support through early help services. The Safeguarding Task Group of elected members provides strong independent scrutiny and challenge to the pace of progress and the quality of the IP. The council and its partners have demonstrably prioritised the quality of child protection practice and ensured that children are safe. However, they accept that the pace of change and improvement has been slower in other areas of the service. It is accepted therefore, that momentum for positive change needs to be widened and continue beyond the conclusion of IP delivery timescales by December 2013.
39. A comprehensive commissioning strategy is supporting the change across universal, targeted and specialist services. It is suitably informed by the needs of the local population as detailed in Wiltshire's Joint Strategic

Needs Assessment 2012-13 and by the views of children, young people and partners. It is effective in ensuring that the 'right resources are available at the right time'; for example, the re-commissioning of single family support service to replace a previously diverse and disparate range of services that were not well co-ordinated or consistent in their application of thresholds.

40. A clear set of accountabilities are firmly in place between senior elected members, senior managers within the council including the Director of Children's Service (DCS), partner agencies, and the independent chairs of the Boards. They are in frequent contact to discuss issues affecting children and their families. This occurs through a variety of forums such as a programme of meetings, one to one sessions and informal contact that takes place within a newly-established culture of appropriate challenge, so that senior leadership does not revert to a culture of complacency about the safety of the county's children. The commitment and reach demonstrated by elected members to the improvement agenda is particularly impressive, and they are highly active and visible in ensuring that standards are raised in protecting the county's children.
41. The WSCB is now meeting its statutory duties and responsibilities following a commissioned review of its governance arrangements, which identified major deficits. An initial delay in implementing changes has been rectified by appointment of an independent chair who has begun to accelerate the pace of improvement, supported by a streamlined and therefore more efficient Board structure. Board membership now includes senior managers from key agencies and they have readily embraced a culture of challenge amongst partners. Scrutiny by inspectors of recent WSCB minutes provides evidence of open and rigorous interrogation of reports to the Board. As part of its revised Business Plan (BP), the WSCB is taking action as a priority to ensure that the views of children and young people are taken into account in the business of the Board. Consideration of equality and diversity is also not yet fully established within the work of the Board but is an integral part of its BP. The serious case review (SCR) subgroup benefits from a recently appointed and knowledgeable chair, who has sharpened the focus of the group and introduced a number of measures that aim to streamline processes in undertaking and disseminating learning from SCRs. However, it is too early to comment on the sustained positive impact of outcomes for children by recent overall improvement in the governance arrangements of the WSCB.
42. A comprehensive review of workforce planning and staff development across the partnership by the Children's Trust has enabled staff to enhance the core skills required to recognise and protect vulnerable children. Targeted coaching and training provided specifically to the child protection conference chairs has been successful in improving the quality of child protection plans and ensuring that they are outcome focused. The

Children's Trust's Early Help strategy gives clarity to individual agencies across universal, targeted and specialist services on their responsibility to ensure that their staff are competent and confident in child protection work. However, they are at the beginning of the process of implementing this comprehensive training programme and it is therefore too early to comment on its impact

43. The workforce development strategy is firmly in place and is supported by a workforce plan which has been effective in taking forward identified priorities. A workload analysis exercise has been used to determine the level of staffing required by social care sufficient to meet its statutory duty to protect children. The staffing of the R&A service is equally divided between agency and permanent staff. Whilst there are some very experienced permanent staff, the agency staff are generally more experienced, with the permanent staff group containing a higher percentage of less experienced staff. The council is aware of this and have plans to address this through merging the assessment service with the four community safeguarding teams. Following this planned restructure of social work teams, elected member's agreement has been given to retain agency staff until senior managers are satisfied that capacity meets demand. The council is now proactively recruiting permanent staff with a range of experience, by raising the profile of the county at recruitment open days and a rolling recruitment campaign.
44. A range of performance information is used effectively to enable managers and staff to understand strengths and areas for development across the service. Senior leaders and elected members now challenge the quality of practice at both service and individual case level. For example, a weekly meeting attended by the Service Director, Head of Referral and Assessment Service, Head of Performance and portfolio holder scrutinises the performance of the R&A team and provides independent challenge and support to front line practitioners. The quality assurance and case file audit system introduced as part of the IP is embedding well, and it ensures that managers across children services are responsible and accountable for an on-going cycle of monthly case auditing. A moderation process of re-auditing by senior managers provides additional oversight. This system is adding value to manager's efforts to drive up practice standards and ensure that children are appropriately protected. Operational managers also take an active role in improving standards when chairing the multi-agency Gateway Panel. This forum not only makes decisions on thresholds for additional resources to support planned intervention, including legal intervention, it also provides the opportunity for additional management oversight of child care practice across children's services. Inspectors observing the panel saw examples of cases where social workers were able to gain an objective and informed critique from senior managers and use it to inform their case work and planning for children.

45. The vision for children in Wiltshire is clearly articulated and underpinned by an emerging culture of transparency and constructive challenge. All staff interviewed spoke positively about these changes, and could provide examples of continuous learning from a range of sources. For example, the formal post qualifying training that is now in place for all staff, or the mentoring and coaching provided by the Principal Social Workers (PSWs). The PSWs have a designated role to focus on and improve practice standards. However, their impact is not clear, as they do not work within a measurable framework that is inclusive of prescribed success criteria. There is confidence across the partnership that complaints are now taken seriously and dealt with efficiently. An effective escalation process is securely in place and senior managers are available, open and responsive to resolving any escalated issues.
46. Senior managers and elected members are actively involved in ensuring that they plan ahead to meet the needs of their population. The implications of the large and growing armed forces presence within the county is being analysed to ensure children in this community continue to be protected. This will be further enhanced by work currently being undertaken by the Prevention of Harm sub-group of the WSCB on the implications for the partnership of the multi-agency response to child protection concerns raised by armed forces families. There is a lack of systematic focus to gain the views of children and parents about the services provided to them regarding early help, child in need and child protection services. Parents spoken to by inspectors had variable views of the quality of help provided and some commented on the frequency of the change of social worker which affected their engagement. Some services have made efforts to gain service user evaluations and these are positive. However, these efforts are insufficiently comprehensive and results are not sufficiently aggregated to enhance learning and drive improvement over time.

Record of main findings

Local authority arrangements for the protection of children	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers	Adequate
The quality of practice	Adequate
Leadership and governance	Adequate