

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Swindon Borough Council

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Reporting inspector

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two inspectors from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.

2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- discussions with 46 children and young people and 22 parents/carers receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services who is also the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.
- analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), performance data and information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision.
- a review of 18 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
- the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres undertaken in July 2009.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements
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Service information

4. In January 2009 Swindon Borough Council's population included 43,358 children and young people aged 0 to 18 of which 25% are aged 0 to 3. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below the national average. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 17% of pupils in primary schools and 14.4% of pupils in secondary schools which is below the national average of 24.5% and 20.6% respectively. The percentage of pupils who speak English as another language has increased from 8.1% in January 2007 to 10% in October 2008. One hundred and five languages are spoken in Swindon schools an increase of 16 since January 2007. The largest increase is in the number of pupils whose first language is Konkani, Polish, Nepali or Portuguese.

5. The Swindon Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board (Children's Trust) was set up in May 2006. The Trust includes representatives of Swindon Borough Council, Swindon Primary Care Trust, Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services, Job Centre Plus, Swindon Parents and Carers Advisory Group, Wiltshire Police, the Learning and Skills Council, community and voluntary organisations and school representatives. At the time of the inspection, the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board was chaired by the Group Director Children's Services and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in Swindon to deliver safeguarding services. An independent Chair has been appointed who commences in January 2010.

6. Social care services for children are provided by 132 foster carers. Children's residential care is provided through commissioned contracts with independent providers. Community based services are delivered by three social work teams, a children and families intervention team (CFIT), four integrated locality teams and an integrated service and social work team for children and young people with disabilities. Services are provided to looked after children and care leavers by the children in care team, the family placement team and the Route 16+ team. Private fostering services are provided through a specialist social work post. Other family support services are delivered by the voluntary sector, extended services in schools and through 11 children's centres across Swindon.

7. At the time of the inspection there were 250 looked after children. They comprise 44 young children (0 to 5), 188 children of school age (5 to 16) and 18 young people post-16 and older care leavers. Swindon uses a virtual school approach in its support for looked after children to raise standards of individual

achievement and attainment, celebrate their successes and increase the overall rates of progress made by looked after children.

8. Commissioning and planning of health services are carried out by Swindon Borough Council and the Swindon Primary Care Trust (PCT) through an agreement under section 75, National Health Services Act 2006. Acute hospital services are provided by Great Western Hospitals NHS Trust. Learning disability services are provided by integrated services for disabled children. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the targeted mental health in schools service (TAMHS) are provided by Great Western Hospital and Swindon Borough Council children's services.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

9. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Swindon is good. Policies and procedures for the protection of children are comprehensive and up to date. Joint working between the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust is effective in ensuring a shared vision across the partnership, agreeing priorities for improvement and providing rigorous independent challenge across the sector. This will be strengthened further through the appointment of an independent chair of the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board from January 2010. The Swindon Safeguarding Children Board is driving forward a range of key areas of work across the broad safeguarding agenda and this is leading to improved outcomes for children and young people, such as heightened awareness of cyber bullying and, through the Safety Bus, raising public awareness to promote safeguarding as 'everyone's business'. The work of the Board is supported well through an appropriate range of sub-groups including one specifically for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Trust engages well with children, young people and their parents and carers, seeking their views to help contribute to improvements in service planning. Overall, this leads to good levels of user satisfaction. However, service users feel that they do not always receive sufficient feedback or progress reports on the outcomes from their involvement and also that communication between themselves and some healthcare agencies is unclear.

10. Effective partnerships with the private, voluntary and community sector help provide good quality additional services to meet local needs. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Team Around the Child (TAC) are well embedded across the partnership and used effectively to deliver early intervention and prevention services. Workforce planning is good and has effectively secured skilled, capable and knowledgeable staff across the partnership. However, there is a lack of registered children's nurses or those who have undertaken the specific enhanced skills training appointed to the accident and emergency department of the local hospital. Some 200 members of staff from Swindon PCT have been seconded to the local authority to create the integrated services and £28 million of services for children and young people are jointly commissioned. This is having a positive impact on the quality of safeguarding services delivered to children, young people and families. Through increased use of the CAF and TAC, schools have significantly improved their direct work in the safeguarding of children and young people. However, there are 66 children and young people receiving alternative education provision of less than 25 hours a week and in some cases their plans are unclear or not sufficiently up to date. The unannounced inspection of children's

social care contact, referral and assessment arrangements carried out in July 2009 identified areas for development regarding the timeliness, recording and writing up of initial assessments. The local authority children's services responded quickly to address these issues and current practice demonstrates significant improvements have been made. Within children's social care too much reliance has been placed on informal consultation between worker and manager and management oversight and decision making are not always evident on case files.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 1 (outstanding)

11. The capacity for improvement is outstanding. Political and managerial leadership across the local area partnership is outstanding and provides a good impetus for driving forward the safeguarding agenda. There is strong commitment demonstrated by partners, including the voluntary and community sector, to ensure that the well-being and safety of children and young people are at the heart of all service planning and delivery. The partnership has a very good track record of achieving and sustaining improvement over time, clearly demonstrated by improvements made to services since the joint area review (JAR) in 2006 and through its delivery of the CYPP. A very thorough, up to date needs assessment and self assessment are in place. Joint commissioning arrangements between Swindon PCT and Swindon Borough Council are well advanced with three National Health Service Act 2006 Agreements in place for joint commissioning, integrated services for disabled children and integrated multi-agency teams. The capacity to improve the local authority children's services core business for the delivery of child protection services is good. However, an unprecedented number of referrals to children's services in June 2009 resulted in the service response being limited to child protection referrals during August. By the time of this inspection, referral rates had returned to normal levels. The council is keeping this issue under review to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet demand. The high usage of police powers of protection to remove children from home to a place of safety requires review by the police and children's social care to ensure this is not due to a lack of capacity in either service. Overall, there are outstanding systems in place across the partnership to monitor and evaluate performance and to make continuous improvements to services. However, at an operational level within children's social care, first line managers need to ensure more effective management oversight of the content of casework records.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- Swindon Borough Council to improve the quality of social work case recording and to ensure effective performance management, including oversight of the content of the files.

Within three months:

- Swindon Borough Council to ensure all cases of children and young people who are receiving alternative education provision of less than 25 hours a week are fully reviewed and the plans are updated.
- Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Police to review the high usage of police powers of protection to remove children and young people to a place of safety and ensure that agencies review decision-making processes to ascertain whether a lack of capacity within either of the services is influencing practice.

Within six months:

- Swindon Borough Council to put in place a single, corporate and comprehensive database to record vetting and barring checks undertaken on all staff that work with, or are in close contact with, children.
- Swindon PCT to ensure that transition arrangements and processes within healthcare services, where there is no comparable adult healthcare service, are made clear to young people and their carers so that they fully understand which services they can expect and within what timeframe.
- Swindon PCT to put in place arrangements to recruit and appoint to the accident and emergency department at Great Western Hospitals Foundation Trust a sufficient number of registered children's nurses or those who have undertaken the specific enhanced skills training.
- Swindon PCT to ensure that the Great Western Hospitals Foundation Trust develops plans for a designated children and young people's area within the accident and emergency department.

Outcomes for children and young people

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 2 (good)

13. The effectiveness of services in Swindon to ensure that children and young people are safe is good. Outcomes show that partners are effective in identifying children and young people who are in need of safeguarding and child protection services. Good early preventative work is undertaken through the use of the CAF and TAC. Both approaches are well embedded and used extensively to identify need and shape services. In 2008/09, 300 CAFs were completed resulting in 217 multi-agency meetings with families. There are tailored plans to meet individual need and parents who contributed to the inspection report positively on how these interventions have helped them 'turn their lives around'. Multi-agency and single agency safeguarding training is well established across all partner agencies. It ensures that all staff are equipped with the skills to recognise risk and take appropriate action to safeguard children and young people. Clinical staff interviewed during this inspection report that, in accordance with PCT policies and procedures, they have regular access to child protection supervision.

14. The proportion of good or better safeguarding inspection judgements exceed national averages in early years and school settings, with the exception of one pupil referral unit and one special school inspected in September 2009. Remedial action has been taken by the pupil referral units to ensure sufficient safeguards are now in place to promote the health and safety of pupils. The adoption and fostering services have been judged as outstanding and good respectively in their most recent inspections. A wide range of activities is provided by schools, children's centres and youth services to encourage children, young people and their carers to be aware of safety issues, both within their homes and in the wider community. Health visitors and school nurses play a key role within the community in supporting and educating children, young people and families on wider health and safeguarding issues.

15. The delivery of human resource functions, including the recording and monitoring systems for the vetting and barring of staff in children's services, was contracted to Capita in 2007. The system is adequate and meets statutory requirements. However, there is no overarching record system for all staff who work with, or who are in close contact with, children and young people. For example, Human Resources send reminders to managers in children's social care when Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks require updating or when re-registration with the General Social Care Council is required, but no check is made by Capita to ensure that the reminders have been acted upon. The single record is not scheduled to contain CRB information until 2010, consequently children's services have set up a parallel system to record the required data. Whilst the inspection found no evidence of procedures not being followed, the

lack of a single, corporate and comprehensive database presents a risk to the authority.

16. Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or a disability is good overall and improving. Good integrated services are provided from the Saltway centre encompassing both health and social care. Where appropriate the TAC approach is used to promote early intervention and support parents and carers. The Parent Advisory Group has an effective voice within the partnership; the Chair is a member of the Children's Trust board. Children and young people have access to a range of short breaks, both family and residentially based, with over 50 children and young people receiving a service at any one time. However, some parents voiced concerns that there remains a lack of information about the services on offer. Direct payments are used by 29 families and, although small in number, take-up shows an increasing trend. To reach more families, the council plans to drive forward an increase in take up during 2010.

17. A good transition process to adult services is in place for most young people. However, within the health service, transition arrangements are less clear. A gap has been identified in the transfer processes where there is no comparable adult healthcare service. Examples include transition from the young people's community substance misuse service UTURN, for those with ADHD or Autism and for some young people with life-limiting conditions. As a result, children's health services continue to work with some young people well into adulthood. Whilst beneficial for the young adult concerned, this has led to confusion for parents and carers about which aspect of adult or children's services their child is engaged with. It also masks the real level of need for continuing appropriate healthcare services.

18. Safeguarding arrangements are good for the identification and tracking of missing children. The strategic approach is rigorous, with the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board establishing a Missing Children sub-group that also includes a focus on the sexual exploitation of young people. A temporary post has been established to liaise closely with agencies and undertake return home interviews if no other key worker is involved. This is proving effective both in strengthening individual planning for a child or young person and in helping agencies to learn wider lessons, such as how children are drawn into drug-dealing. A children missing from education policy was developed in 2008, with effective leadership provided by the lead education welfare officer. This has resulted in increased and more timely reporting by schools, thus ensuring more effective safeguarding of children and young people.

19. Targeted action has been taken to reduce permanent exclusions of pupils at Key Stage 3 and numbers have fallen. However, young people of dual heritage are over-represented amongst those permanently excluded and this is an area of work the behavioural support team is following up through support

and monitoring. As a result of the implementation of the new Fair Access Panel, more young people are reintegrated into school. Some 66 pupils are receiving alternative education but often for less than 25 hours per week. Their reviews are not always held on time and some provision is inappropriate.

20. Arrangements to monitor and support elective home education for 76 children and young people are robust. Annual visits are made to most home elective educated families and parents' education plans are reviewed. In some instances, referrals for additional support are made to other services, such as the educational psychology service. Where visiting rights have been refused, the local authority confirms the well-being of the young people concerned through other partner agencies to ensure there are no known safeguarding issues.

21. The Multi-Agency Public Protection and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference partnership is outstanding with direct, positive impact on outcomes for children and young people as a result of good assessment and subsequent actions. Systems for information sharing are of good quality and robust. A more flexible threshold for discussing cases is applied, ensuring all cases where there is significant potential risk are discussed and appropriate action taken. This is good practice and promotes safeguarding. The partnership gives a high priority to work on domestic violence and there are good awareness-raising activities within the community and schools. Good joint working arrangements are in place for the police to share information relating to domestic violence incidents with health and children's social care, enabling appropriate safeguarding decisions to be made. Additional support is provided by the NSPCC for both parents and children who have experienced domestic violence. Plans are in place to build capacity within the wider workforce through training other professionals on the impact of domestic violence on children and young people.

22. Re-offending rates have decreased. The police and council have worked together effectively to try to divert young people away from anti-social behaviour and into more positive activities. The Twilight Football scheme has proved successful with 88% of young people not re-offending. However, anti-social behaviour remains the biggest concern within Neighbourhood Policing Team areas and accounts for the largest volume of community safety issues. Good use of anti-social behaviour orders, acceptable behaviour contracts and early intervention measures, such as oral and written warnings, have been used appropriately to tackle individual cases of anti-social behaviour. During 2008/2009, 22 acceptable behaviour contracts, 12 interim anti-social behaviour orders and 3 full orders were used. The low number of full anti-social behaviour orders compared to interim orders reflects the success of the partnership in curbing anti-social behaviour early and has impacted positively on young people by negating the need to apply for a full order which, if granted, would remain in place for a minimum of two years.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 2 (good)

23. Good and effective action is being taken by the partnership to ensure that children and young people feel safe. The TellUs3 survey in 2008 indicated that the majority of children and young people's responses are in line with the national average, that they feel safe and that most know where to access help and advice if they need it. There is a strong commitment across the partnership to prevent and deter bullying. Swindon has an effective anti-bullying accreditation scheme, which was short listed for the Health and Social Care Award South West in 2009. A third of Swindon's schools (31) are engaged in the anti-bullying accreditation scheme. There has been a high level of investment in awareness and training on cyber-bullying for schools, parents and young people. The 'Think U Know' programme is widely delivered in schools and parent awareness sessions have been delivered across primary, secondary and special schools by the council, the police and youth and community affairs representatives.

24. The Swindon Safeguarding Children Board has made funding available to increase independent advocacy for children and young people, enabling them to participate fully in their child protection conferences, to have their views heard and to feel safe when voicing them. This has had a positive impact, with 60 children and young people attending their conference and having the confidence to contribute. Young carers are identified as a vulnerable group and therefore included within the early intervention and prevention work of the council. Support provided by the Carers' Centre has proved effective in enabling group members to feel more confident in sharing any worries or concerns. The Carers' Centre provides support to 309 children and young people with a caring responsibility, a higher proportion of identified young carers than found elsewhere.

The quality of provision**Grade 2 (good)**

25. The quality of safeguarding provision is good and has improved since the JAR in 2006 when staying safe was judged to be adequate. The workforce across children's services is very responsive to concerns about children's well-being and safety and professionals at all levels throughout the partnership demonstrate a very strong child-focused approach. The CAF and TAC approaches are central to early intervention and prevention services. Very good outcomes across a range of initiatives have been achieved by highly effective work within multi-disciplinary arrangements, for example the Family Life project, sexual health work, the reduction in teenage pregnancies, Nurture by Nature group and specific projects aimed at diverting young people away from violent extremism.

26. The partnership includes the voluntary and community sector and has a broad view of extended services that includes both preventative and reactive work with children, young people and families. Parents with mental health issues and/or engaged in substance misuse are seen as a priority to receive extended services. Earlier identification of families in need is occurring through the work of SureStart and CAF. Good examples of the wide variety and impact of extended services include: parent support advisers helping parents improve their child's school attendance; funding to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at Key Stage 3; extensive family learning provision for a wide range of community groups delivered by the Drove centre and a support group for women in Swindon south who have been subjected to domestic violence. The Swindon 10–18 Project (STEP) is very effective in providing children and young people with good, activity-based therapeutic group work in a safe environment. The safeguarding of children within the provision of adult mental health services is assured through the application of the 'See the Adult, See the Child' protocol. It focuses staff attention on safeguarding the whole family where potential safeguarding concerns may arise as a result of an adult's mental health difficulties. This is good practice and effectively demonstrates how the partnership is implementing learning arising out of national evaluations of serious case reviews.

27. Service responsiveness is good. An unannounced Ofsted inspection of the contact, assessment and referral service in July 2009 identified a number of strengths and no areas for priority action. The council has in place an action plan to address the identified areas for development. At the time of this inspection, good progress had been made in delivering the action plan. Thresholds for access to children's services are clear and in general understood by other agencies. However, during August 2009, a decision taken temporarily to accept only child protection referrals as a result of increased demand has caused some confusion amongst other professionals. They are unclear whether thresholds have changed, since they perceive there to be some variability in practice. The council is taking appropriate action to clarify the position with all partner agencies and to make clear that thresholds remain the same as they were pre-August.

28. The consultative role adopted by the referral and assessment team encourages consultation between professionals from other agencies and a duty worker if there are uncertainties as to whether the criteria are met for a referral. It is an educative process for professionals working with children and families and an effective mechanism for the analysis of risk and safeguarding of children. Such discussions ensure children and young people's needs are met at different levels by the appropriate agency. More professionals feel confident in seeking advice on safeguarding concerns, thus improving the quality of referrals made. Learning is enhanced further through a scheme enabling other professionals to spend two days per week in the referral and assessment team.

This develops professional learning at an operational level and understanding between partner agencies. The emergency duty service works closely with day time teams to develop appropriate strategies to safeguard children where there are known risks. For example, the emergency duty service will, on occasion, make out of hours unannounced home visits to specific children living at home who are subject to a child protection plan and where the daytime service had been unable to make contact with the family.

29. The numbers of children and young people removed to a place of safety through the use of police powers of protection is high. During 2008/09, 15 children, including two sibling groups, had their safety secured for reasons such as being left alone, the poor mental health and substance misuse by a parent, high risk-taking behaviour and, in one case, abuse. Between April and November 2009, numbers have increased to 20. The profile is similar in terms of sibling groups and the reasons for securing their safety. All the children and young people were previously known to children's social care. However, six children in 2008/09 and seven during the year to date have been removed within daytime office hours. The safety of children and young people is being secured by such a high use of police powers, but it does raise concerns about the extent to which children's social care services are involved in the assessment and decision-making processes regarding the children's removal or whether there are capacity issues within the service that need to be addressed.

30. Direct work with children and young people who use safeguarding and child protection services is particularly strong. Children, young people, parents and carers spoke positively about the quality of support and advice provided to them. However, direct work is often provided at the expense of maintaining up-to-date recording. A majority of the cases sampled during this inspection show adequate child protection plans and visiting frequency often above that which is statutorily required. Good communication and joint planning with education and health are consistent features, as are intelligence sharing and joint planning between the police and children's social care. Some very good work with young people whose parents are experiencing problems in parenting and with young people exhibiting challenging behaviour has made a significant impact on the safety of the children and young people concerned. Much work of this type is undertaken as part of a detailed plan, in conjunction with other professionals. However, technical difficulties with the new integrated children's system (ICS) have resulted in social workers being unable to complete the electronic records in a timely manner or to accurately reflect the quality of the work they have undertaken. The council is taking vigorous action to ensure it can deliver what is required to support workers in maintaining robust electronic records. Until this matter is resolved, social workers rely on a combination of electronic and paper records and their own notebooks in which to record case work details. None of the cases sampled had a complete set of notes in either the electronic or paper files. This renders the process inaccurate and unreliable and may

present a risk to the council in terms of secure evidence of its involvement in a case.

31. Training in safer recruitment and management of allegations against staff is very effective and has made a significant impact in raising awareness across partner agencies. Agencies are referring cases appropriately to the local authority designated officer (LADO) and resolution is completed in a timely manner. The approach adopted by the LADO gives other professionals the confidence to discuss and check out any areas of concern. There are appropriate complaints systems in place but there is very low usage by children, young people and families. Where the formal complaints process has been used, issues are followed up by managers and used to inform individual learning and training. The council has acknowledged that the complaints service needs to be given a higher profile and some developmental work is underway. However, these efforts are in their early stages and are not yet having sufficient impact.

Leadership and management

Grade 1 (outstanding)

32. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are outstanding with competent and determined leadership from the council corporately, the PCT, the Children's Trust board and the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board. This is complemented by strong, political cross party support from elected members for children's services and the children's portfolio holder, who is a strong champion and advocate for children and young people. All key partners, including the voluntary and community sector are well engaged with 'Destination Swindon' and focused on delivering robust safeguarding with good outcomes for children, young people their families and carers. From the confidential social workers' survey and inspection interviews, staff confirm that senior managers are highly visible and approachable, with a culture of openness and staff engagement. They feel able to raise concerns about service delivery with managers at all levels and feel their concerns are taken seriously and built into action planning.

33. The updated review of the CYPP is good and based on a thorough needs analysis. Safeguarding children and young people is at the heart of the plan and clearly reflected and articulated by staff at all levels within children's services. The plan clearly defines the partnership's ambition and priorities and sets an appropriate framework for planning and service delivery. It is accompanied by a robust joint commissioning strategy that, through its outcome-based commissioning model, demonstrates some good outcomes for children and young people. Service plans are coherent, with clear links between the CYPP, the Local Area Agreement, the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan and thematic strategic partnership groups.

34. The Swindon Safeguarding Children Board is effective in its professional and community leadership role. Governance arrangements between the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board and Children's Trust are clearly defined. All partners understand their statutory duties to co-operate and discharge these duties well. An independent chairperson has been appointed and will commence in January 2010. Safeguarding strategies, and their accompanying policies and procedures, support practice well. They are updated and aligned to the South West safeguarding and child protection procedures.

35. The corporate process for performance management is well established, with regular reporting to the council's cabinet and scrutiny committees. At a strategic level, across both the partnership and within single agencies, there are good and well established systems for performance, financial management and evaluation leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. For example, the 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaire is being used more consistently across all agencies leading to a more seamless service and improved outcomes in commissioning practice because partners are working more consistently towards the same goals. However, at an operational level within social care, the quality of internal case audits is variable and at best adequate. Supervision structures are good and supervision is held at the required frequency, although its quality cannot be evidenced due to inadequate recording. Action has been taken by senior managers to address this issue but at the time of this inspection there was little evidence of impact.

36. Workforce planning is outstanding. A major focus of the partnership's workforce planning during 2007/08 was the deployment by the council and the PCT of joint resources to improve outcomes for children, young people and families through integrated workforce and joint commissioning arrangements. This has been successfully achieved with the establishment of three National Health Services Act 2006 Section 75 Agreements for joint commissioning, integrated services for disabled children and integrated multi-agency teams. Some 200 members of staff from Swindon PCT have been seconded to the local authority to create the integrated services and £28 million of services for children and young people are jointly commissioned. Strong governance and a clear accountability structure are in place. This development has been very effective in changing the organisational culture and very firmly places the child or young person at the centre of service delivery. Partnership and single agency training is well resourced and valued by staff. It includes comprehensive child protection training at levels appropriate to the recipient's role. Supervision for healthcare staff within the integrated teams is provided by their direct line manager, with clinical supervision provided within the appropriate PCT line management structure.

37. Recruitment practice is compliant with statute and guidance, and some significant inroads have been made into long standing recruitment difficulties in some key areas. At the time of inspection, there are no vacancies for health

visitors, school nurses or heads of schools and within children's social care, with the exception of two posts, all vacancies will be filled by January 2010. However, there are an insufficient number of registered children's nurses or those who have undertaken the specific enhanced skills training appointed to the accident and emergency department at Great Western Hospitals Foundation Trust. Training and retention of these nurses remains an issue and the fact that the hospital does not have a specifically designated children's accident and emergency area or department may contribute to this. There are only two registered children's nurses and an emergency nurse practitioner. If children or young people present at accident and emergency, there is thus no guarantee that they will be seen by an appropriately trained paediatric nurse. There are contingency plans in place enabling accident and emergency staff to have 24 hour access to the child health department and information cards on child protection available to them but there remains the potential for safeguarding concerns to be missed.

38. Service users' views effectively inform strategic developments and individual case planning processes. The voice of children and young people is valued and there are some outstanding examples of their active involvement in influencing the council and the work of the Children's Trust. The Youth Forum has chosen its own health priorities that have been incorporated into the children and young people's delivery plan. The development of the young inspector programme, although in its infancy, is beginning to have impact. Young inspectors have inspected the CAF, sexual health services for young people and youth offending services. A powerful DVD has been made by children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to inform officers and others about how they feel and what they want from services. Inspectors observed young carers present their revised strategy to the Children's Trust board and noted its acceptance by the board. However, some children, young people, their parents and carers report that, having been consulted, they are then not kept sufficiently well informed as to what is happening as a result of their contribution.

39. At a strategic level partnership working is outstanding. The Children's Trust and the Swindon Safeguarding Children Board go further than just fulfilling their statutory duties. They provide highly effective community and professional leadership and demonstrate their influence across all areas where the safety and welfare of children and young people need to be considered. At an operational level, front line staff work collaboratively to deliver children's plans. Information-sharing protocols are well established to good effect, with positive outcomes in individual cases and effective identification of new or changing local priorities.

40. The promotion of equality and diversity is good and was addressed well in the updated needs analysis in May 2009. The children and young people's delivery plan makes clear and appropriate links between its priorities, actions

and the equalities strand and there is good identification of where to target action. Vulnerable groups are identified early and, where necessary, receive sensitive and targeted services. The Drove centre hosts a wide range of support and training to promote equality and diversity well and provides outreach support to over 60 schools. Parent support workers are very effective in helping to engage families from a range of communities. Inspection fieldwork has identified examples of good initiatives and projects across partner agencies that have been very successful in making a difference for individual children and young people. Work with asylum-seeking young people and with vulnerable groups and the targeted mental health service to schools are particular strengths. Parents of disabled children are mainly very positive about the personal services and support they receive. Vulnerable groups are actively encouraged to shape their individual case plans and influence service development. Where appropriate, advocates or interpreters are available to ensure children, young people and their families are appropriately supported.

41. The achievement of value for money is good. Swindon is a low funded authority, with a per capita allocation for children's services well below the national average and similar authorities. However, the council makes effective use of the resources at its disposal. The CYPP 2008–2011 is linked to the medium term resources plan and to children's services budget planning. Resources are allocated to priority areas, for example additional resources from the PCT and the local authority have been identified for reducing teenage conception, substance misuse and reducing the number of children in care through intensive work with families and young people. The council reports that the 2008–09 budget achieved cashable efficiencies and outturn was within budget. Investment and service development is targeted at groups of children identified as vulnerable. Costs are well benchmarked. Joint commissioning arrangements are well advanced, as evidenced by the three National Health Services Act 2006 section 75 Agreements, and clear accountabilities and priorities are in place. The council has invested in a number of measures to improve outcomes and reduce costs, for example, service redesign of CAMHS, the development of family support services in the voluntary sector and innovative family intervention projects. In 2008–09 family support services were successfully tendered, resulting in better value for money based on outcome-based specifications. All contracts are reviewed quarterly with performance and financial information scrutinised by officers resulting in year-on-year savings.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

42. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and young people is good. The CYPP shows that partners are working together to meet agreed targets and develop new services to meet changing needs. Adoption and fostering services are of a high quality and no child or young person is accommodated in a commissioned service that has been judged by Ofsted to be inadequate. There is total commitment across the partnership to a very strong child and young person centred approach to service delivery and the determination to improve outcomes for looked after children. Corporate parenting is good overall, with a clear commitment to safeguarding looked after children and care leavers. However, elected members who sit on the corporate parenting board do not provide an effective level of challenge. Contracting and monitoring arrangements for commissioned services are good, with a strong focus on outcomes for children that has helped maintain good placement stability. The PCT fully contributes to ensuring that the health needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers are proactively addressed and applies the same level of service to looked after children and young people who are placed outside the borough. The partnership's strategy for looked after children is explicit in its expectation that most children should not spend their childhood in care. This is being realised through high level investment in early intervention and prevention services to support children and young people on the edge of care to remain in their families and communities and by enabling looked after children to return safely to birth families or live with families through adoption, residence orders or special guardianship arrangements.

43. Outcomes for looked after children are good and demonstrate that the council and its partners are meeting the individual needs of looked after children and care leavers. There is a recently formed Children in Care Council which is in its infancy and has yet to make an impact. The views of looked after children are represented through participation in consultation events and their individual reviews. Young people surveyed, or whom inspectors met as part of this inspection, confirmed that they feel listened to, that individually their views are acted upon and that they receive a good service. Although adequate overall, case records are not well maintained and there is variability in the quality of recording; up to date assessments and reports, and care plans do not all have recommendations documented in measurable ways within set timescales. There is too much reliance on informal discussion and decision-making between case workers and managers. This results in line management supervision and decision-making not being consistently documented, making it difficult to track the professional oversight of these cases. A complaints system is in place to support looked after children and young people but it is under-

used. This issue is being addressed by the council but progress is too slow in ensuring children and young people know how to access the service and of the availability of advocates to support them.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (good)

44. The council and its partners have good capacity to improve services for looked after children and young people. There is effective leadership at all levels with shared ambition and prioritisation to meet the needs of children and young people clearly articulated. Performance against indicators for looked after children are generally better than in similar areas and the national average. Good systems are in place to ensure regular multi-agency monitoring of outcomes and detailed attention is given to early indications of emerging problems. The effectiveness of a wide range of programmes to prevent children entering into care, the quality of looked after services and the impact of strategies to minimise children and young people needing to remain in the care system result in improved outcomes for children. The track record of securing key improvements in the quality and costs of provision is good. Monitoring arrangements for commissioned placements are rigorous with performance measures linked closely to the providers' ability to demonstrate improved outcomes for looked after children and young people. There is evidence of good practice and extremely dedicated and committed practitioners working well in partnership at all levels. The virtual school, led by an experienced and committed headteacher, ensures effective strategies support the education of looked after children, including those placed outside the borough.

Areas for improvement

45. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in Swindon, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- Improve the quality of social work case recording and ensure that there is effective performance management oversight of the content of the case records.

Within three months:

- Ensure up to date assessments are in place and reports and care plans for looked after children and young people are improved with recommendations documented in measurable ways within set timescales.

- Ensure looked after children and young people are fully aware of the complaints procedure, how to access it and the availability of advocates should they require support.

Within six months:

- Ensure elected members on the corporate parenting board provide more effective challenge which has an impact on improving the lives of looked after children and young people.

Outcomes for children and young people Grade 2 (good)

46. Services to promote good health among children in care and care leavers are good. Health partners give priority to looked after children and, once an assessment of health needs has been undertaken, they have good access to appropriate and timely healthcare services. The looked after children's nurse is proactive in following up the healthcare needs of children and young people placed out of borough to ensure they receive the same level of service as those living within the borough. Robust systems are in place across healthcare settings to alert the looked after children's nurse to any routine missed appointments or if a looked after child or young person presents at the accident and emergency department. The looked after children's nurse is proactive in following up to ensure further consultation or treatment appointments are kept. Care leavers have good access to the looked after children's nurse for information, advice and guidance. The Looked After Children's Education Service (LACES) has designed dedicated training for teachers on the health and well-being of looked after children. Foster carers receive formal training in their preparation and development programmes to ensure they are aware of their role in promoting healthy lifestyles of the children and young people they care for.

47. Good performance in respect of routine health checks has been maintained and 95% of looked after children and young people receive their annual health assessments and dental examinations in a timely manner. A majority of looked after children and young people (77%) are up to date with their immunisations. There is a fast track process available for looked after children to access CAMHS and substance misuse services. CAMHS placement support workers are effective in supporting looked after children and young people to maintain placement stability through direct work and support and training of foster carers. The 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaire used with looked after children and young people has proved effective in identifying their mental health needs, monitoring their emotional well-being and in planning interventions where necessary. Looked after children surveyed for this inspection confirm they receive useful advice from adults on healthy diets, sexual health matters and participate in physical exercise. The rate of under 18

year old conceptions is at its lowest rate since 1998 when data collection began. Whilst teenage conception rates are below the national average, they remain higher than the south west average. Work with looked after young people is very successful in addressing this issue.

48. Children and young people who are looked after benefit well from good quality safeguarding arrangements actively promoted through the commissioning and procurement processes. All residential and some fostering provision is commissioned from the independent sector. No looked after child is placed in any provision that has been inspected by Ofsted and judged to be inadequate. The focus on promoting and maintaining placement stability is an important strength. The most recent Ofsted inspection of the adoption and fostering service judged the services to be outstanding and good respectively. Looked after children and young people's needs are reviewed on time through statutory review processes and their views are listened to, with a clear focus on children's safety. Although only 19 children and young people completed the pre-inspection survey, they confirmed that the advice they receive from adults about keeping safe is useful and that, if they were being harmed, there are people they would be able to tell about it. In cases sampled, the frequency of social workers' contact and visits to a looked after child or young person is good and exceeds statutory requirements. Although there is evidence of appropriate multi-agency engagement with children and young people not all assessments or care plans sampled are up-to-date. Care plans analysed by inspectors were not specific enough in respect of desired outcomes and, in most cases, the identification of timescales for achieving them was missing. The evidence of oversight and decision-making by managers is variable and generally not clearly demonstrated in the supervision records or the electronic files.

49. It is the council's practice to allocate all looked after children to a qualified social worker. However, at the time of the inspection, 19 looked after children and young people were allocated to six children's social care workers who hold childcare or teaching qualifications but not a recognised social work qualification. These 19 children and young people are in stable placements and well known to the workers who had previously undertaken co-working with a qualified social worker. The council confirmed that each case has been risk assessed and agreement reached that it is in the child or young person's best interest to continue being allocated to the unqualified worker. All of the unqualified workers receive monthly supervision from the team manager or assistant team manager. Although not specifically recorded, this issue is kept under further review by the independent reviewing managers at each child or young person's statutory review. On the files sampled by inspectors, there was no evidence that outcomes for these children and young people were inappropriate or not being met. The council has a clear policy that any future cases will be allocated to a qualified social worker.

50. The impact of services on enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good. Headteachers support the partners' ambition for, and prioritisation of, improved outcomes in education for all looked after children and young people. There are specifically designated teachers and governors in all schools to support and be aware of the needs of looked after children and young people. Over half of looked after children have special educational needs identified through statementing, school action and school action plus. A dedicated service is provided by the LACES, which oversees and actively promotes progress, and provides additional support where necessary, including additional homework support groups. All looked after children and young people have a personal education plan of reasonable quality but only 69% are up to date. However, there is thorough tracking of an individual child or young person's progress which is monitored monthly by the Monitoring Low Achievement Children Group. Where it is required, individualised support packages are put in place. Whilst attainment overall is low compared to all children nationally, the gap is being closed. There is an improved picture at Key Stages 1 to 4 compared to 2008. At Key Stage 2, five young people out of 12 achieved level 4 in English and four out of 12 achieved level 4 in maths. At Key Stage 4, four young people out of 26 looked after children achieved 5 GCSE grades A* to C. A task group of senior managers within children's services is currently reviewing cross-directorate support to improve the educational attainment of looked after children. Some young people reported to inspectors that, whilst they appreciate the annual awards ceremonies for looked after children and young people, they feel 'expectations for them are not high enough'.

51. Improvements are noticeable in the rising school attendance rates, with a reduction to 6% in 2008/09 of looked after children missing 25 days schooling, an improvement on the 10% of the previous year. No looked after child has been permanently excluded from school for the past seven years and no looked after child or young person has been subject of a managed school transfer within the past year. The appointment of two behavioural support workers attached to LACES is effective in helping reduce the number and length of fixed exclusions for looked after children and young people. Personal Education Allowance funding has been used effectively to increase looked after children and young people's educational attainment and individual talents, for example, by providing additional help with English as a second language, additional out of school tuition, sporting activities and specialist equipment for young people with learning difficulties. Formalising links with universities and summer schools has encouraged two young people to start A level courses in September 2009. The 'Swindon Card' promotes opportunities for looked after children and young people to enjoy their leisure time by enabling them to participate in local authority leisure and sports facilities at a significantly reduced cost.

52. Opportunities for looked after children to make a positive contribution are good. They are encouraged and supported to participate in a wide range of

cultural, community and leisure activities. Some looked after children and young people have helped to shape the Children in Care Pledge and the Corporate Parenting Strategy. A Children in Care Council has been formed and will link to the corporate parenting board. Some looked after young people are young inspectors who are involved in assessing the quality of services. Others are members of the Youth Forum and have actively shaped the CYPP. After a dip in performance during 2008, children and young people's participation in their statutory reviews has increased to 94%, higher than similar authorities and the average for England. These reviews are undertaken within the required timescales. The views of children and young people are evident through the assessment and direct work undertaken with them during the review process. During 2008/09 independent visitors have been matched to 22 young people and there is a good advocacy service in place. However, although used by some looked after children and young people, the inspection survey disappointingly revealed that 12 out of 19 respondents did not know what an advocate was. Good work with looked after young people who are at risk of offending has produced good outcomes, with only 5% receiving a final warning or a conviction compared to 9.5% nationally. The successful year-on-year reduction highlights the effective joint working of youth offending agencies and the police.

53. The impact of services in enabling looked after children and young people and care leavers to achieve economic well-being is good. The current economic climate has reduced employment opportunities in Swindon and partners are actively seeking ways of trying to ensure employability and educational opportunities for young people and care leavers. To help achieve its aim, Swindon has joined the National Employability Project for care leavers and the local apprenticeship project. In order to improve services for care leavers, the 16+ team has been re-focused into a Route 16+ team, linking closely with the children in care service and LACES to provide an effective and seamless transition for the young people concerned. Good progress is being made to engage young people in education, employment or training. All care leavers receive financial support to access further and higher education and an ongoing commitment by the council allows them, where appropriate, to stay in or return to their foster home beyond the age of 18. Out of 26 young people leaving Year 11 in 2009, 85% went into full-time education. In addition three unaccompanied asylum seeking young people enrolled on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses and two other care leavers entered university. Nearly all looked after young people have a pathway plan to which they contribute. However, on files sampled, the quality of plans is variable. The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is good. There is a range of accommodation options available to care leavers, such as supportive lodgings, which are effectively assessed and monitored, and Key 2, which offers intensive support to young people. The Route 16+ service offers effective support to care leavers which is highly valued by them. As one care leaver told

an inspector 'The social worker is right on the money, they don't judge you, they help you on that basis and are receptive'.

The quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

54. Service responsiveness is good. The number of looked after children increased to 259 during 2008/09, the highest peak for a number of years, reflecting the national trend. However, by the time of this inspection, numbers of looked after children and young people had reduced to 250. Added to this, the partnership is very aware of the implications of local demographic changes and are factoring these into current and future planning. Over 90% of looked after children and young people are now placed in foster care.

55. Assessment and direct work with looked after children and young people are good. Good preventative services are in place for those children and young people on the edge of care. The Adolescent Support service delivers flexible and intensive support to families to maintain young people at home. To date it has worked successfully with 33 children and young people on the edge of care with only three needing to become looked after. Good use of the CAF, interventions from the Family Life project and the children and families intervention team have all positively supported families to care for their children. There is an effective placement panel that ensures appropriate resources are available to ensure children and young people have stability either at home or in their placement. For those children and young people who have entered the care system, improved commissioning and procurement practice has resulted in good outcomes in relation to health, education and placement stability. Placement stability is supported by direct work, such as that provided by the looked after children nurse, CAMHS, LACES and early intervention work. Commissioning processes use the 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaire model to seek the best outcome based options for a child or young person needing a placement. Looked after children and young people are involved in assessment processes, and planning and review mechanisms ensure placement providers deliver a service that meets the child or young person's individual needs. Parents of children in care who met with inspectors reported positively about the current service they are receiving. Transition arrangements are improving with some good evidence of the CAF and children in need plans being used to support children and young people to return to their communities.

56. Case planning, review and recording are adequate overall. A majority of children and young people have an adequate care plan but, on cases sampled, the care plans were not documented in a sufficiently clear style. In some there was a lack of analysis or updated assessments. Case recording, not helped by the difficulties with the electronic integrated children's system, is variable in quality. However, there is also variability in the quality of recording in the

supervision and case records of line managers and overall, in cases sampled, a lack of sufficient evaluation of a worker's performance. Despite records not always including robust analysis, timely and succinct recording or a clear timescale for achieving outcomes, the achievement of partners in securing placement stability and positive outcomes for looked after children and young people is good.

57. Safeguarding arrangements are established across the partnership and there is a high level of awareness of the need for vigilance in placement arrangements which are built into all aspects of the commissioning and reviewing processes. The LADO is very effective and efficient in dealing with referred cases where a complaint has been made about a member of staff working with children. There is clear evidence that the wider partnership is fully conversant with the LADO's role and responsibilities.

58. Although complaints and advocacy systems are in place, too many looked after children and young people are unaware about how to make a complaint. Currently this issue is being addressed by the council and some young people are involved in designing a specific complaints leaflet for children and young people in care. However, these efforts are not being progressed in a sufficiently timely manner.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (good)

59. Leadership and management of services for looked after children are good. Across the partnership there is a very strong commitment from all agencies to deliver improved outcomes for looked after children and young people. A child-centred approach and the promotion of their safety and well-being are at the heart of all activities and engagements with looked after children. Political and managerial leadership across the partnership is having increasing effectiveness in improving outcomes for looked after children, with visible ambition and prioritisation for services. Corporate parenting is good overall with a clear commitment to safeguarding looked after children and care leavers. However, elected members do not provide a sufficient level of challenge through the corporate parenting board resulting in it being unable to demonstrate its impact.

60. Performance management and workforce development within the looked after children's service are good and ensure performance targets are met and reviewed. All levels of the service are appropriately engaged in performance management but with variable results. Monitoring of commissioning and contracting arrangements is robust and has led to improved outcomes for children and young people. Systems for managers to ensure statutory visits are made within timescales, that children are seen alone, and that reviews are held on time, are satisfactory. However, while supervision of staff within children's

social care services is generally carried out in accordance with the policy, the quality of decision-making is not consistently reflected in the records.

61. User engagement is good with children and young people involved in a wide range of consultation activities. A majority of looked after children and young people are engaged in their reviews. Overall, those who completed the pre-inspection survey reported that they feel listened to, that their reviews take notice of their wishes and feelings, their reviews work to make sure their care is what they need and their care plan is being kept to. To increase the participation of looked after children and young people, the partnership is targeting different groups on a specific task basis. There is little direct contact between children and young people in care and elected members. However, this should be resolved as the children in care council becomes better established.

62. Partnership working is outstanding and well established both at strategic and operational levels. Strategic planning through the Children's Trust is effective and child-focused. The Children's Trust board involves a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector partners. At an operational level and in order to support and improve outcomes for looked after children and young people, a range of services such as the youth offending service, police, fire service, Connexions and looked after children health and education teams, work very effectively in partnership to deliver good outcomes.

63. The promotion of equality and diversity for looked after children is good. The partnership's knowledge of its children and young people population is on the whole secure and the variety of needs known. The updated self assessment derived from the CYPP has identified well the relevant issues and priorities for 2009/10. There are some very good aspects in meeting individual need. For example, some good work has been undertaken with a small group of asylum-seeking care leavers to meet their religious and cultural needs. Through consultation with them, appropriate housing was obtained for them near to their place of worship.

64. The contribution of partners to achieving value for money is good, particularly with low costs of placements for children in care and foster care, and the low cost of children's social care services. Swindon's average weekly costs for looked after children in 2007/08 were the seventh lowest nationally. Improvements in commissioning and procurement and savings have been achieved while improving service quality and expanding choice of placement. Where a previous decision has been made to place a child or young person in a high cost independent placement, their individual need is prioritised over cost. If the placement remains stable and is promoting the child or young person's health, safety and well-being, it is maintained.

Record of main findings: Swindon Borough Council

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Good
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Good
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Good
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Outstanding
User engagement	Outstanding
Partnerships	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good
Value for money	Good

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution	Good
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Good
Service responsiveness	Good
Assessment and direct work with children	Good
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	Good
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Good
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good
Value for money	Good