

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children **Rutland**

Inspection dates: 7 January to 16 January 2013
Lead inspector Nicholas McMullen

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 Rutland 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 Rutland, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure that decision making regarding new referrals is consistent and robust, clearly and fully recorded and subject to regular management overview
- ensure that all children in need cases have a clear plan focused on addressing their assessed needs and that the progress and appropriateness of the plan is regularly reviewed
- ensure that management case discussions clearly record any decisions made and, where relevant, timescales for agreed actions.

Within three months:

- establish robust processes for cases moving between support provided under the common assessment framework (CAF) and targeted social care interventions, including clear and well recorded access to social work advice and expertise
- improve the consistency and quality of work undertaken under the CAF

- ensure that Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board provides effective scrutiny and challenge of the progress of work being undertaken to improve early help services in Rutland
- undertake a safeguarding audit of open disabled children's cases and review the arrangements for management oversight of this work.

Within six months:

- ensure performance management and quality assurance arrangements include a clear and consistent focus on service quality and that progress in key areas of improvement is regularly evaluated
- establish arrangements to strengthen the influence of the experiences and views of children and their families in the development of child protection and children in need services.

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 three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).
8. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

9. Rutland is the smallest county in England with a population of around 39,000 people of whom just over 8,000 (21%) are under 18. It is relatively affluent but with some small pockets of deprivation. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is significantly below the national average. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7% of the total population, compared with 15% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups are mixed heritage and Asian. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is well below the national figure. A significant feature of Rutland is the number of forces personnel based in the area with their families. In 2012, 930 army personnel moved into Rutland, including 189 aged under 16 and similar numbers are expected to move into the area in 2013.
10. Contacts and referrals relating to potential children in need are made to one duty and assessment team which undertakes initial and core assessments and section 47 enquiries. Cases requiring statutory services as children in need, including those in need of protection, are transferred to a long term team which also works with looked after children. Disabled children are supported through social workers based within the inclusion

service. Targeted family support is provided by a specialist intensive family support service (IFS) which offers intensive, time limited interventions and by staff based in the Visions Children's Centre which operates a hub and spoke model across Rutland. Targeted youth support, including mentoring and individual direct support is available from the county youth service. Emergency cover out of hours is provided through a service shared with Leicestershire and Leicester city while the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) arrangements cover Leicestershire and Rutland.

Overall effectiveness

Adequate

11. Overall effectiveness is **adequate**. Since the inspection of safeguarding and looked after services in October 2011, significant progress has been made in some areas. As a result, the quality of assessments has improved and, when children are identified as in need of protection through a multi-agency child protection plan, they usually receive a good service. However, the coordination and effectiveness of services for children requiring early help through coordinated multi-agency provision is inconsistent and the quality of support provided to children in need is too variable.
12. Child protection services in Rutland receive strong political support and this is reflected in the prioritisation of resources. Careful financial management has enabled front line services to be preserved and, where necessary, enhanced. There is strong and visible leadership from senior managers and an outward looking approach and philosophy which enables Rutland to participate and benefit from regional development work. Inevitably all managers carry a wide range of responsibilities and a recent lack of stability in management arrangements, has constrained the authority's ability to drive forward improvement in all the necessary areas. Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board functions well and efficiently and is undertaking a range of intelligent improvement work. It has, however, given insufficient attention to the development of early intervention and the operation of common assessment framework (CAF) arrangements in Rutland.
13. Children and young people in Rutland benefit from a range of single agency early intervention services but work to improve the integration of this support has not yet ensured children are receiving well coordinated help based on a clear assessment and sound planning. Processes for identifying children requiring such support and stepping up children where progress is not being made are also insufficiently robust.
14. Local professionals are based close to each other and generally communicate well. Universal services know how to refer to children's social care and these referrals receive a prompt and usually appropriate response, although in some cases assessments were not instigated when the referral information indicated a social work assessment was required. Assessments, when undertaken, are usually of a good quality with clear analysis of risk. Child protection planning is sound with well-focused objectives, purposeful work and good partnership working. Progress against plans is reviewed regularly and thoroughly. Child in need work is much more variable: some children receive good social work support but for others their plans are unclear and not pursued or reviewed with enough rigour.

15. Social workers can access managers for advice and support and receive regular supervision. However, the recording of case discussions does not always demonstrate the rationale for the decision or set timescales for proposed actions. An integrated approach to supporting disabled children promotes an holistic approach to addressing their needs but the local authority needs to assure itself that safeguarding needs are appropriately identified and addressed within these arrangements.
16. Performance management is adequate and has supported some service improvements but the local authority needs to strengthen its approach to evaluating and improving the quality of services provided to vulnerable children. Good individual examples were seen of work promoting young people's participation in their care planning but this is not systematic and user views and experiences are not directly being used to inform the development of child protection services.

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

Adequate

17. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people and their families is adequate. For children identified as requiring protection from significant harm, risk is usually well managed and so reduced, but in a small number of cases, risk indicators had not been adequately assessed or responded to. The majority of contacts receive a timely and prompt response and are dealt with appropriately, but in some instances contacts within the duty and access team were closed prematurely, without the required enquiries or assessment being undertaken. The local authority has been proactive in reducing the number of repeat referrals, which are now below statistical neighbours, meaning more children are receiving support in a more timely fashion although the number of repeat referrals continues to fluctuate. The duty and access team audits all repeat referrals and this is necessary to consolidate and further develop good practice in this area.
18. Most assessments are completed in a timescale consistent with the child's needs. Nearly all assessments seen by inspectors were judged at least adequate with a majority good. As a result decisions about what services a child needed were generally soundly based and clear plans formulated to address these needs. In some cases a change in circumstances did not routinely lead to further assessment and it was therefore unclear whether work was being informed by an up to date assessment of needs and risk. Assessment and planning overall adequately considers childrens' needs arising out of ethnicity, culture, religion and disability but the implication of these issues from the child's perspective is not always fully recognised or addressed.

19. Children with complex needs arising out of their disabilities benefit from a coordinated multi-agency approach. Workers use a range of communication methods to facilitate childrens' participation in reviews and in meeting diverse needs, including cultural and social inclusion. The council supports training for parents to help them communicate with their children effectively and this enables them to better safeguard these children. Caseloads within the specialist disability service are high and cases are not being sufficiently well monitored to ensure all safeguarding needs are identified and addressed.
20. Outcomes for most children who are the subject of multi-agency child protection plans improve as a result of clear and well focused plans, effective partnership working and communication and purposeful and supportive professional relationships being developed with families. Where necessary progress is not achieved, services are proactive in considering more robust action including legal intervention. In such cases, workers access appropriate legal advice provided through a partnership arrangement with a neighbouring authority. Outcomes for children receiving services as children in need are more variable. Some benefit from well-coordinated and focused support, including practical help with housing and budgeting issues, and from intensive support provided by a specialist family support service. In other cases however, work with children in need is not clearly enough focused on the key areas requiring change, becomes distracted by adult needs and is subject to drift and delay, all of which prevents childrens' needs being met.
21. In meetings observed by inspectors, parents and young people's involvement was sensitively managed and they were supported to express their views and feelings. Parents and young people spoken to by inspectors were positive about most of the staff who had worked with them and valued the support they had provided. Most felt they clearly understood the purpose and intentions of the help they had received. This was, however, a small sample and the local authority has no processes for more routinely gathering the views of children and families experiencing child protection and child in need services. In some of the poorer quality child in need work considered by inspectors, it was difficult for parents to understand the intentions of the support being provided or what was expected of them.
22. The local authority has in place a range of early help services including support provided through its Visions Children's Centre and targeted youth work services. As individual services these undertake positive work with children, young people and their families which helps meets their needs and prevents circumstances deteriorating so that more statutory support is required. The Visions Children's Centre has recently been proactive in extending its reach to vulnerable and hard to reach families within the community by providing drop in clinics and establishing a profile within the local armed forces base. These actions have improved take up of services.

23. The local authority has identified the potential benefits of better integrating and coordinating the support that is provided to children and made this a strategic priority. This includes aiming for increased and better use of the CAF and team around the family approaches. However use of these approaches remains underdeveloped and too variable in quality and impact. Children and families who might most benefit from multi-agency support at this level are not consistently identified and issues of consent and identifying a lead professional too often create further barriers to accessing appropriate support. Inspectors did see some examples where children and families were clearly benefiting from support coordinated through a CAF but in others progress was less clear and work was not being informed by a clear assessment of need.
24. A senior early intervention officer was appointed by the council in September 2011. Since this appointment CAF activity has increased significantly, assisted by training, practice guidance and support for lead professionals. The council has recently established an early practitioner forum to strengthen collaborative working arrangements and professionals seen spoke very positively about this initiative, although it is too early to evidence impact. Overall, there is evidence of increasingly effective use of the CAF and team around the family approaches but this is from a low base with, as yet, insufficient impact for children and families.
25. Consideration of contact, CAF and children in need casework indicates inconsistency and lack of clarity around the application of thresholds. Inspectors found that while there are arrangements for professionals managing CAFs to seek advice where concerns escalate, the recording of discussions and the rationale for decisions is often poor and incomplete. As a result, while examples were seen of cases appropriately being escalated to social workers, in others there was insufficient consideration of the implications of changes in family circumstances or lack of progress. This led to decisions to maintain cases at a CAF level being not well founded. Similarly, in a small number of cases where step down to the CAF process was sought, this was not achieved due to lack of a lead professional and lack of clarity around thresholds. The draft protocol 'Achieving Best Outcomes' provides a clear framework for all Rutland partner agencies to work together effectively to promote good practice and outcomes for vulnerable children, including the principles underpinning step up and step down guidance. The location of a social worker within the children's centre is also planned to improve access to social work advice on these types of cases. These are both well thought out developments linked to a sound understanding of current challenges but it is too early to demonstrate impact.

The quality of practice

Adequate

26. The quality of practice is **adequate**. External agencies understand how to make a referral and in nearly all cases seen by inspectors the referral was timely and appropriate for consideration by children's social care. Professionals can also access advice from the duty manager about whether and how to progress with a potential referral. However, the processes for children moving to and from CAF processes are less assured and thresholds not consistently understood and applied. At the point of contact and referral, most children and young people receive a timely response and those identified as at risk of immediate harm are responded to with appropriate urgency. All cases requiring assessment are allocated to and investigated by a qualified social worker. While decision making is timely and decisions clearly recorded, the rationale for decisions is not always demonstrated in records. In a small number of cases, contacts had been closed prematurely without an initial assessment and, in one case, a poor decision was made regarding the outcome of section 47 enquiries. In all these examples local authority managers took prompt and appropriate action to review these cases once they were made aware of them by inspectors.
27. The out of hours arrangements to protect children are well established, with experienced staff working within a clear framework to provide emergency responses to children who may be at risk. Communication with day time services is effective and enables out of hours workers to access sufficient information to respond appropriately to presenting issues. The service provides regular management reports on its activity which include attention to service usage in Rutland and any issues arising from this.
28. Child protection section 47 investigations are timely, follow a strategy discussion and are undertaken by qualified social workers. Most strategy discussions are by telephone with the police which limits the ability of other professionals to contribute to planning the enquiries. Local authority staff report that capacity difficulties sometimes make it difficult for the police to undertake joint visits but when, in their view, this is clearly required representations are made to ensure children's safety is not compromised. Records of strategy discussions record the outcome of the discussion but often lack detail regarding the planning of the enquiries, including roles and responsibilities and any particular factors and history to consider. Similarly, whilst decision making is usually appropriate and proportionate, the rationale for decisions is not always clearly recorded. As well as impacting on accountability, this meant that in some cases it is difficult to fully understand the history of previous social care involvement with a child.

29. Nearly all initial and core assessments seen by inspectors were at least adequate. Core assessments and reports to child protection conferences were generally good. Appropriate account was taken of historic factors and information from other agencies and risk was clearly focused on and analysed. Children's views and experiences were usually considered in assessments but, in some cases, there was an over emphasis on adults' needs and behaviours without fully drawing out the implications for the child and their daily experiences. The quality of CAF assessments was generally weaker with a number seen failing to capture a full picture of the child's needs or being mainly descriptive.
30. Arrangements to protect children requiring multi-agency child protection plans are generally robust. Children are consistently visited and seen and talked to alone when appropriate. Social workers understand the importance of building supportive relationships with children and showing empathy alongside respectful challenge when working with parents. In a number of cases, inspectors saw the benefits for children of this approach. Partner agencies also generally contribute well to the delivery of child protection plans, with particularly positive examples seen involving housing and youth services. Most professionals engage well in the core group process, although the contribution of adult substance misuse services is not consistently evident. Child protection plans are of good quality with realistic, outcome based objectives which link clearly to the assessed risks of a child. Case conferences are well chaired, with good attendance and participation from key partners and with appropriate focus on children and young people's needs and risks. Where necessary, chairs provide sensitive but thorough independent challenge and, as a result, decision making is usually sound and proportionate. The attendance and participation of parents, and in a small number of cases young people, is sensitively managed. Parents normally see social work reports at least a day before the conference but not those of other agencies which would be best practice. Improvements have been achieved in the timeliness of distributing conference minutes and the local authority's monitoring shows that it is now meeting its own standards in this area.
31. The quality of work and planning for children in need is too variable. Whilst some good examples were seen of well-focused work based on clear plans and reviews, the majority of work ranged from adequate to inadequate. While some key needs are identified in plans, these do not consistently lead to focused and specific targets with clear timescales. In a significant minority of cases, work was subject to drift or delay and processes for reviewing plans and responding to changed circumstances were neither robust nor timely. In a small number of cases, there was very little evidence of any recent activity, although in these cases children were not being left at risk of significant harm. The local authority has recognised some of these deficits itself through its case auditing and introduced some measures to improve practice but with so far limited impact.

32. Most case records include evidence of management oversight and workers report that they can readily access managers for advice and direction. Examples were also seen of reflective practice in supervision records although this is not consistently provided. Overall there is adequate, and some good, oversight by managers and they know the cases in their teams well. However, records of supervision discussions often do not specify timescales and it is sometimes not clear whether they are revisited at the next discussion. When the circumstances of a family change significantly, managers were not always proactive in identifying the need for review or in ensuring the outcomes of any review is clearly recorded.
33. The timeliness and thoroughness of case recording has improved significantly since the inspection of safeguarding and looked after services in October 2011. In most cases, recording is reasonably up to date and provides at least an adequate overview of activity on the case and its current status. Chronologies are undertaken on most long term cases, although the quality of these varies. Some good examples were seen where the chronology was clearly a useful tool in maintaining an overview of the case history but other examples were incomplete or completed with little attention to their purpose. Cases where there had been repeat referrals to social care often lacked chronologies which would have promoted a better understanding of the history of involvement and concerns. Records of social work visits identify whether a child was seen and seen alone and whether the visit was announced or unannounced but conclusions drawn from the visit were not made explicit. The recording of core groups was also variable and sometimes did not reflect the richness of information sharing and discussion which had taken place.
34. Children and young people can access appropriately independent advocacy services. Social workers are aware of this service and promote it with young people. Potential and actual take up is low so it is not possible to evaluate the quality of advocacy provided by this service. However examples were seen of workers advocating strongly on behalf of the children and young people they were working with. Children and young people are also encouraged to express their views and participate in meetings in ways which are comfortable for them. In a number of cases, children were being visited more frequently at school rather than in the home environment and it was not always clear what the rationale for this was, or whether the child's view on being visited at school had been considered.

Leadership and governance

Adequate

35. Leadership and governance are adequate. Rutland's size means that senior and middle managers are close to front line services and their community but also have a wide breadth of responsibilities. This presents

opportunities and challenges. Local leadership is visible and accessible and has a strong understanding of the needs of children and families in Rutland and a clear commitment to meeting these. However, the breadth of demands placed on managers, combined with some recent changes in senior management positions has constrained its ability to drive forward improvement in all the necessary areas.

36. There is strong political support for services for vulnerable children in Rutland. Members understand their responsibilities and work actively to fulfill these. The Lead Member provides clear and balanced leadership and is supported by an active scrutiny committee which is well engaged with the safeguarding and child protection work of the county and provides appropriate challenge. Members use their strong community links to help them monitor the performance of local services and this complements the regular performance reports they receive and scrutinise. Support for child protection is reflected in the Council's prioritisation and, in a challenging budgetary climate, resources for child protection and early intervention have been protected and where necessary enhanced backed by sound financial planning and management.
37. The accountabilities and respective responsibilities of the Lead Member, Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and independent Chair of the LSCB are clearly understood and worked to. The Chair of the LSCB is a member of Rutland's Children Trust and meets regularly with the Director of Children's Services and where necessary the Chief Executive.
38. There is a clear local strategy for the development and provision of early help and intervention. This demonstrates recognition of the value of early support and a commitment to achieve improvements in this area. The strategy was launched in 2011 and considerable effort has been put into its implementation but, in some key areas, progress has been limited. As a result, children and families below the threshold for statutory social work intervention but requiring coordinated support are not yet receiving consistently strong and appropriate multi-agency support based on a robust assessment of their needs. Decision making about whether targeted social care services are required is not consistent and processes to step up and step down cases are not sufficiently robust.
39. Local Safeguarding Children Board arrangements cover both Leicestershire and Rutland. This is a pragmatic and appropriate arrangement which enables Rutland to benefit from access to wider learning and economies of scale in the development of policies and services. Rutland's managers engage and contribute well to the work of the Board which is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities and promoting reflective learning, for example through its safeguarding babies initiative. The Chair of the Board is suitably experienced and works actively to fulfil his responsibilities to Rutland alongside the much larger, and therefore potentially dominant, Leicestershire. As a result of this leadership and Rutland's engagement, its

needs are generally considered appropriately within the work of the LSCB. However, a significant exception to this is the area of early intervention where insufficient attention and challenge has been given to current areas for development and the particular circumstances of Rutland.

40. The local authority has a sound understanding of its performance including key strengths and areas for development. Issues recognised as requiring development, including those identified through inspection, are given appropriate attention and prioritisation. As a result, concrete improvements have been achieved in some areas of practice such as the quality of assessments and timeliness of recording. However, in some other areas, such as early help, user experiences informing service development and child in need planning, progress has been much slower.
41. Leaders and managers use performance data regularly to monitor services. This has supported service improvements in some areas such as assessment timescales and sustained good performance in others. However use and impact of more qualitative information requires further development. Regular and thematic case auditing is undertaken but is variable in its effectiveness. Routine case auditing requirements are not always met and these audits have been too focused on process compliance and have not sufficiently assessed or scrutinised the quality and impact of the services being provided. Some better quality auditing on specific issues has taken place, for example on core assessments, and contributed to service improvements. However, in other areas such as children in need, action planning in response to audit findings has not been sufficiently clear or robust. The local authority has very recently developed a single children's social care improvement plan which provides a clearer focus on improvement activity and its impact although it does not yet include all key areas requiring improvement. The LSCB contributes appropriately to performance management through its ambitious balanced scorecard approach, although some elements of this, such as user and staff feedback are as yet underdeveloped. Some attempts have been made to evaluate the quality and impact of current work undertaken through the CAF. This has informed managers of current activity and given an understanding of some of the challenges to improvement but has not given a clear overview and evaluation of the quality of work undertaken. Robust arrangements are not in place to fully assure the quality of safeguarding work with disabled children.
42. Feedback from children, young people and families has informed the development of early intervention and youth services but there is much less evidence of user feedback informing the development of child protection and children in need services, despite this being a recommendation from the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in October 2011. This is also recognised by the LSCB as an area for development. The local authority is outward looking and actively seeks learning from external sources such as peer review, regional

development work and LSCB case reviews and uses these to inform its improvement work. Examples were also seen of learning from complaints leading to concrete actions to improve service responses.

43. The local authority has faced significant challenges in recruiting suitably experienced social workers and managers, although nearly all social work posts are now filled with permanent appointments. Overall capacity has been increased in response to service pressures and gaps have been adequately covered through the use of agency staff. Social work caseloads are manageable. Staff report feeling supported and inspectors saw consistent evidence of workers being able to access managers for professional support and of managers paying attention to workers' wellbeing. Managers are also taking steps to promote reflective practice although this is not yet consistently embedded in practice. There is a clear commitment to continuing improvement but less evidence of supportive challenge being used consistently and effectively to drive this improvement. Social workers, including those who are newly qualified, access a range of appropriate training and development opportunities which enables them to keep abreast of practice developments in areas such as child sexual exploitation and working with neglect. Most workers have an up to date appraisal and development plan and, whilst these varied in quality, in the best examples they clearly brought together development needs and training plans. The local authority has identified the need to further develop the skill base of its early intervention workforce and has plans in place to address this.

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