

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough

Inspection dates 28 June – 9 July 2010
Reporting inspector Robert Hackeson HMI

Age group: All

Published: 6 August 2010

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About this inspection

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

2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- discussions with children and young people receiving services, parents, front line staff and managers, senior officers, executive directors including the director of children's services, the chief executive of the council, the chair of the children's trust board, chief executives and chief operating officers from the local health organisations, elected members, and a range of community representatives.
- analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of serious case reviews undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.
- a review of 28 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This presented 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 contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Rochdale children's services undertaken on 1 and 2 December 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. The borough of Rochdale in Greater Manchester covers 62 square miles, two thirds of which is countryside, while the population is concentrated in four distinct townships: Rochdale, Middleton, Heywood and the Pennines. The borough is ranked the 25th most deprived of 354 in England. Regeneration projects include the Housing Market Renewal programme and the Metrolink.

5. The population of Rochdale, currently approximately 206,500, is expected to grow to over 217,000 by 2021. This contrasts with the national trend where urban and city populations are declining. Rochdale has approximately 52,500 children and young people aged 0 to 18 representing just over 25% of the total population of the borough. In January 2010 30.6% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 21.3% in England overall. Some 24% of pupils speak English as an additional language. In addition to English, the most commonly spoken community languages in the borough are Urdu, Punjabi and Bangla. Pupils from a Black background make up 2% of children, 23% are of Asian background and 2.5% of mixed heritage.

6. Rochdale Borough Children's Trust was established in 2004 as a children's partnership and became a children's trust in 2006. The trust has an independent chair and includes representatives of Rochdale Council, NHS Middleton, Heywood, and Rochdale, Police, Link4Life (leisure trust), schools and colleges, JobCentre Plus, Connexions and the voluntary and community sector. Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (RBSCB) brings together the main organisations that work with children and families including the council, Probation, CAFCASS, NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale community health services, the Pennine Acute NHS Trust, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, and Rochdale Borough Housing. At the time of the inspection short-listing had taken place for the appointment of an independent chair for RBSCB.

7. Rochdale has 161 in house foster placements and 19 short-break carers. There are three children's homes and a residential respite unit for children with disabilities. Community-based services are provided via the access and support service, children in care service and children with disabilities service. Within these services are the child protection team, duty team, child and family support teams, children in care teams, fostering team, adoption team, residential children's home service, the young persons support team for care leavers, the children with disabilities team, occupational therapy team and outreach services for children with disabilities. There is also an out-of-hours service and specialist support team working with children in care and those on the edge of care. There are 16 children's centres and a number of other family support services provided by the voluntary and community sector. The youth

service leads targeted youth support services based on a team around the school approach at every secondary school and this model is being rolled out to primary clusters.

8. At the time of the inspection there were 454 children in care, with 154 children under five years, 272 aged five to 16, and 28 aged over 16. In addition there were 89 care leavers supported by the young people's support team.

9. Rochdale has 91 schools comprising 69 primary schools, 14 secondary schools, four special schools and four nursery schools. The headteacher of one of the special schools also manages the pupil referral unit (PRU) which is registered as one unit but operates from two sites. Rochdale uses a virtual school approach to support the education of children in care and the looked after children achievement officer deals exclusively with these students and works with schools and social workers to develop effective personal education plans. Schools in Rochdale work collaboratively to reduce exclusions and have agreed protocols for managed transfers between schools and the PRU. A multi-agency panel meets regularly to deal with complex cases to determine appropriate provision for the most vulnerable young people, while another multi-agency placement panel meets to consider the needs of children and young people who require specialist externally-sourced provision.

10. The borough of Rochdale is coterminous with NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale. NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale commissions community health services from its provider arm, Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale Community Healthcare Services. Acute services are commissioned from Pennine Acute Hospital NHS Trust and mental health, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), from Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

11. The overall effectiveness of the safeguarding services in Rochdale is adequate. Safeguarding practice across the partnership is adequate or better in most areas and there are notable examples of good practice such as the work of the youth service. The children's social care service is providing an adequate safeguarding service overall and the family support service is highly regarded by families and other agencies. In December 2009 the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements identified three areas for priority action and a further ten areas for development. The service has drawn up a detailed action plan to address these deficiencies and there is evidence that some improvements have been achieved, but further work is needed to improve the service at the point of access.

12. While there are many examples of good partnership working at a practice level, strategic partnerships remain underdeveloped. Changes are being made to the RBSCB to take account of the new requirements of Working Together 2010 including strengthening its representation and the children's trust has completed a review of its function leading to a revised membership and focus. Alongside these changes is an increased recognition of the importance of constructive challenge by board members and ownership of plans by all partners. A number of serious case reviews have been completed over the past four years and, while lessons have been identified, these have not all been embedded in practice. The scrutiny function of elected members is underdeveloped.

13. The current Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is an interim plan for one year based on a limited strategic needs assessment and does not articulate specific priorities. A new, more comprehensive CYPP with measurable outcomes is in development for 2011. The children's trust is listening to the views of service users to help shape its needs analysis. Consultation with children, young people and their families is a strength and is embedded in practice across services.

14. While there are many good projects and services helping to keep children safe in Rochdale, further improvements are required to the quality of work in the access and support team in order to keep the most vulnerable children safe from significant harm.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

15. The capacity for improvement is adequate. The Executive Director of children's services is new in post and some appointments at a senior level are also recent. This has contributed to fresh impetus in children's services and a willingness to accept external challenge. The council is making increased use of

external advice and the experience of temporary managers to reconfigure its duty and assessment service. Changes already made to the RBSCB and the children's trust board add to capacity, and there are some areas where the capacity to improve is good, such as the commissioning arrangements and the contribution made by voluntary and community sector.

16. The capacity to improve the children's social care service, in particular the duty and assessment service, is adequate. Exposure to external advice and challenge has contributed to a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in children's services. Since the unannounced inspection, substantial additional resources for children's social care have been made available by the council, and staff recruitment is in progress. There is a determination to appoint good quality staff, and managers are taking a cautious approach to appointments. Improved management reports are helping to provide good quality information on performance in the access and support service which is kept under careful review. Improvements have been made since the unannounced inspection but progress has been slow in some areas, for example in the timeliness of core assessments. Significant workload pressures remain in some parts of the service, particularly the independent reviewing officer (IRO) team.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- Accelerate the reconfiguration and development of the duty system to ensure that referrals are securely risk assessed and dealt with promptly, that accurate feedback is always given to referrers and appropriate action is taken to safeguard children.

Within three months

- Improve arrangements for reporting safeguarding activity to elected members so that they can provide robust challenge and scrutiny of this work.
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity within the IRO service to meet the requirements of the new statutory guidance in relation to looked after children and provide robust challenge to child protection plans and care plans.
- Review the current thresholds used in the assessment and support team to ensure they do not act as a barrier to children accessing children in need and child protection services; ensure that multi-

agency agreement is secured to the review of thresholds through RBSCB.

- Further improve the quality and consistency of initial and core assessments.
- NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale in conjunction with RBSCB should establish which health staff have not undertaken level 2 and 3 or equivalent training and arrange training to ensure that all relevant staff have the necessary safeguarding training.
- NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale should ensure that there are robust systems in place within unscheduled care settings which identify those children and young people known to social care.

Outcomes for children and young people

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 3 (adequate)

18. The most recent inspections of regulated services and other settings in the borough have rated safeguarding as satisfactory or better in all cases. However, there have been a number of serious case reviews in the borough over the last four years resulting in a large number of recommendations for agencies, with some recommendations being repeated in subsequent reviews. The RBSCB has recently improved its scrutiny process to ensure that individual agency action plans are fully implemented and that practice is improved as a result. Briefings have been held for front line staff about the findings of serious case reviews; all staff interviewed had attended and had the chance to reflect on their practice in the light of the lessons learned.

19. Children's centres and the youth service are making a successful contribution to keeping children safe in Rochdale. The multi-agency approach in children's centres to delivering services to children and families is successful in increasing parenting capacity and improving outcomes for vulnerable children. Direct work with hard to reach families, such as shared play sessions and support groups for young parents, is resulting in parents taking an increasing role in monitoring the progress and development of their children. The active role parents are taking in multi-agency planning for their children has resulted in these families engaging more readily with services for their children. The development of the common assessment framework has supported this work. The seamless service offered to children and parents at Sandbrook Primary School and Children's Centre visited during the inspection provides continuity of care and good monitoring of vulnerable children.

20. A good strategy is in place to manage fixed and permanent exclusions from school. This has been successful in significantly reducing the number of

days lost in education by all children. Multi-agency arrangements and practices to identify children missing from home, school and care, are effective. Statutory guidelines in relation to complaints made against staff working with children are consistently followed.

21. The Extended Schools programme provides a range of universal and targeted programmes and activities for children and young people. Programmes are developed in consultation with key partners, parents and children and are responsive to the needs of local communities. Vulnerable children, including those with disabilities have priority access to a good programme of activities including breakfast clubs, after school and holiday activities. This is successful in raising the self-esteem and aspiration of children.

22. The Sunrise team, launched in December 2009, brings together police, health, children's social care and sexual health services into a specialist team to support young people at risk of sexual exploitation. While early signs and levels of engagement are encouraging, it is too early to report on the success of this team. The Early Break service is targeting vulnerable young people with drug and alcohol abuse problems giving good support and protection.

23. Some very good work has been done by the RBSCB in partnership with leaders from local mosques and madrasahs to provide child protection training for all of their teachers. The engagement of parents in this has been good and the work has also served to strengthen community relations in the borough.

24. The accident and emergency service information system at Rochdale Infirmary does not 'flag' children who are known to social care, or are subject to child protection plans or looked after. As a result there is a risk that staff at the hospital are unaware of the significance of the child's presentation, or who has parental responsibility. Staff are currently unaware of action to address this concern.

25. The rate of teenage conceptions has reduced by 12% from the 2008 baseline. However it remains high, and the latest published data show an increase from 48.7 per 1000 in 2007 to 54.9 per 1000 in 2008. Young people have reported that the family planning centres are not user-friendly, and this is why they do not attend for advice and contraception. Funding has been secured for a domiciliary contraceptive nurse to work with the teenage pregnancy specialist midwife, and partners hope that going out to young people will improve their take up. Other interventions to reduce conceptions include relocating clinic sessions for young people from the town centre to the most deprived areas where rates of teenage conception are highest. However, results are mixed, with staff in the service reporting that in some cases relocation has had a negative impact on attendance.

26. The teenage pregnancy specialist midwife sees and books in all pregnant young women under 18 years of age, and this pathway works well. Following assessment, those with higher needs remain under the care of the specialist midwife, who has good links with Connexions and a dedicated health visitor to

deliver flexible care packages. Schools generally support the targeted approach to pregnant teenage students. Although not all schools are engaged in the programme, most schools now successfully integrate teenage parents and pregnant students into the school curriculum. There is a good record of pregnant teenage women and teenage parents being in education, employment and training. Some 40% of those on a 'young parents to be' course gained either a level 1 or 2 accreditation and were able to access the full examination curriculum.

27. A central booking system for termination of pregnancy has improved access to terminations and more terminations now take place under nine weeks. The service is beginning to use pregnancy and termination data to target services for young people. For example, school holidays have been identified as peak times for conceptions and targeted action at these times is to commence this year. There is evidence from presentations for second terminations that some young women had not been offered sufficient advice or follow up if they failed to attend for contraception after their first termination. In particular, there was limited contraceptive follow up after termination when this was performed by the Pennine Acute Hospitals Trust.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 3 (adequate)

28. The TellUs4 survey indicated that 74% of the 2319 respondents felt safe where they live compared to 81% nationally. Some 86% felt safe going to and from school, while 91% felt safe in school; these are in line with the national average. Some 29% did not agree that there are safe places to go out to do activities on Friday and Saturday nights compared with 20% nationally. The findings of the survey were fully reported to the children's trust board in April 2010 and the themes arising are being kept under review.

29. Young people from the youth council were able to identify areas of risk in their local community and were helping the council to improve safety on the streets. All young people who spoke to inspectors were able to identify a trusted adult with whom they could confide. Young people spoke of being proud to live in the borough of Rochdale.

30. The social and emotional aspects of the learning programme is embedded in nearly all schools and is helping children to feel safe and to develop strategies to cope with threatening situations inside and outside school. Work by the police at the end of the school day and on public transport home from school has reduced levels of anti-social behaviour which threatens the more vulnerable children. There is strong evidence of the success of the anti-bullying strategy and safeguarding arrangements in schools are good. The team leader for Education Welfare is the lead for this work and is also a member of the RBSCB.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

31. The quality of provision is adequate overall although many assessments of children and families are inadequate. The threshold model for targeted services operated by the council is not fully understood by all partners and a review is in progress. In its current form, the model can be a barrier to accessing services. This was seen in some cases where the initial screening was done by unqualified staff and the decision about the threshold level was not underpinned by an assessment of need. A new process for duty, introduced during the inspection, is designed to ensure that such decisions are always based on an assessment by a qualified member of staff and that feedback to referrers on the outcome occurs routinely and systematically. However, it is too early to determine the impact of this recent initiative.

32. Evidence given to inspectors by some partner agencies and parents of children in need who were interviewed, and from cases seen during the duty room visit, demonstrates that thresholds for access to children's social care services are high. While staff told inspectors that thresholds are now lower than a year ago, this was not apparent. In some cases families were referred or referred themselves a number of times before an initial assessment was undertaken and services were accessed. More work is needed to achieve a position where thresholds are agreed between partner agencies and implemented consistently based on a good assessment of risk.

33. There is some good information sharing between the police and partners on domestic violence. The police classify domestic violence incidents against an agreed multi-agency protocol designed to ensure that cases receive attention according to priority. However, there are difficulties for children's social care in responding quickly and appropriately to the very high volume of domestic violence incidents.

34. Some progress has been made in resolving the issues identified as priority actions in the unannounced inspection. The timescales for initial child protection conferences has improved steadily over recent months. The unannounced inspection found that some contacts were closed off inappropriately. Fieldwork indicates this is still happening in some cases and a number of cases were referred for the views of senior management where there was inadequate assessment of risk. Appropriate action has been taken in relation to these cases to make sure needs and risks are fully assessed and responded to but the underlying problems require further remedial action. Assessments of private fostering arrangements are not robust and do not take into account all available information and presenting risks. The quality of initial and core assessments remains inconsistent. Some initial and core assessments have been undertaken by unqualified staff. The Executive Director acted swiftly to cease this practice during the inspection and all assessments are now undertaken by qualified social workers. The council is reviewing decisions made on all those assessments that were completed by unqualified workers. The rate of core

assessments is high which places pressure on staff, and performance remains poor on the number completed within timescales.

35. Section 47 investigations are conducted by qualified social workers and those seen were of good quality with appropriate action taken to ensure children are safe. The social workers in the child protection team are working well to deliver safe services for children but they have high caseloads and a series of changes to their management arrangements has undermined confidence and morale among some staff. Some good direct work with children in need and those subject to child protection plans is being done by family workers. This includes the work of the out-of-hours team.

36. Case files randomly selected were of satisfactory quality overall demonstrating up-to-date recording with regular visits, core groups and reviews. The one case referred by inspectors to senior officers, due to concern over the number of times that the children had been subject to child protection procedures and the number of times the case had been opened and closed, received a good response with a clear analysis of past errors and lessons for improvement. Most files showed evidence of satisfactory plans for children and of management oversight although this is much more clearly apparent in the child protection team than in the duty service. The integrated children's system (ICS) system is working comparatively well and generates a range of reports that enable front line and more senior managers to keep a close track of workloads and workflow in children's social care teams. Some health professionals now have limited access to ICS which aids prompt and efficient information sharing.

37. The generic emergency duty team (EDT) operates an adequate service and has good access to senior management for advice throughout the shift. Communication between the EDT and the daytime service has improved following a recommendation arising from a serious case review. Plans to create a dedicated EDT for children's services are on hold due to financial constraints. The out-of-hours family support service complements the EDT and is highly regarded by families and other agencies for providing very good practical support to families at times of the day and night when they cannot access help from elsewhere. The out-of-hours service also undertakes 'safe and well' visits to families whose children are subject to a child protection plan. These visits are a fundamental component of many plans and are helping to keep children safe.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

38. Ambition and prioritisation are adequate. The recently appointed Executive Director of children's services has wide experience of safeguarding and has made it a priority to improve the integration of services at strategic level within the council and across the partnership. Her influence is already apparent in driving improvements in children's social care services. Key partners, including the voluntary and community sector, are well engaged in the improvement

agenda for children's services but the impact of this engagement varies across agencies and groups.

39. The children's trust board has been re-aligned to take account of recent government guidance and has increased the membership of the voluntary and community sector. In the past the board has performed a basic scrutiny function and its impact on outcomes for children and young people has been difficult to measure. Support and challenge by members are improving and the board is now focused on shaping the next CYPP. The board recognises the need to clarify its priorities and to make targets specific, measurable and achievable.

40. RBSCB has reached a critical point in its development and, having identified what needs to change, is now about to re-focus its work on its core business as described in the new edition of Working Together and to appoint an independent chair. The board is reviewing its membership to reduce the number of participants, to ensure the appropriate level of strategic representation and to increase minority ethnic involvement, more closely reflecting the makeup of the local community.

41. The board's scrutiny of safeguarding work is underdeveloped. Currently data are reported without commentary or analysis and there is no reporting on the quality of work across the partnership agencies, for example, the findings of file audits. RBSCB is introducing a new performance framework for this purpose which has been produced by the North West regional local safeguarding children board network. This will include both evaluation of the data and comment about the implications for the service. Appropriate safeguarding strategies and policies are in place, but the level of compliance is not sufficiently well tested. RBSCB has improved scrutiny of serious case review (SCR) action plans and now seeks evidence that agreed actions are in place. Not all SCRs have been evaluated as adequate or better. However, practice has improved with the more recent SCRs being rated good. A lead general practitioner (GP) for safeguarding is appointed to write independent individual management reviews on behalf of the practices involved, and this has improved the quality of the reviews. A joint child death overview panel operates across three local safeguarding children boards for Bury, Oldham and Rochdale. The panel reviews all child deaths to ensure that lessons are learnt and there is evidence that good practice is shared effectively across health providers

42. A new head of safeguarding post has strengthened the governance arrangements in the Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust and there is a good degree of rigour and challenge to all health board reports. However, not all senior health provider staff were fully aware of the health priority areas of the CYPP, the Teenage Pregnancy strategy or the implications of these policies for future commissioning and monitoring of services.

43. The council has responded positively to the findings of the unannounced inspection by committing significant additional investment and providing support to children's services from other directorates for improvement planning.

The action plan for the Access and Support service arising from the inspection findings is thorough and regularly monitored, and there is some evidence of progress. However, there is still much to be done. The council has responded positively to this inspection's critical challenge to the current structure and functioning of the duty and child protection systems. Some changes to the duty system are being made to simplify the process, improve management oversight and make better use of resources, but it is too early to assess the impact of this work.

44. Local commissioning, including joint commissioning, is developing well. There are some good examples of effective commissioning such as the Early Break service which works with young people with alcohol and substance misuse problems and the Connections Trust that provides counselling and support for vulnerable children and young people who run away from home or from care. Additional resources have been allocated to some services as necessary. However, the IRO team does not have the capacity to ensure that scrutiny and challenge are always effective in preventing drift and delay in care plans.

45. The limited content and analysis of performance information and infrequent presentation to the council's overview and scrutiny panel limit the ability of elected members to provide effective scrutiny of safeguarding activity. Performance management systems are adequate in determining needs in the borough but less effective in auditing and improving practice on the front line. Partner agencies have failed to embed serious case review findings systematically into practice. These include findings in relation to record-keeping, communication with adult services and inter-agency working, which have been repeating themes in serious case reviews. RBSCB has improved its monitoring of action plans. The 'Critical Friends' initiative to investigate the extent to which messages from serious case reviews have been integrated into front line practice is good. The council's children's services and health provider organisations are making better use of internal evaluation and external challenge to identify deficits and improve safeguarding services and outcomes for children and young people. Performance indicators are mostly in line with those in similar areas with the significant exception of timeliness of core assessments.

46. All health organisation trust boards confirmed that they receive annual reports from the safeguarding teams and monitoring of reports and outcomes takes place through the governance structures of each trust. New service level agreements are being introduced which include quality monitoring standards for providers to adhere to in the future. There is a good degree of rigour and challenge to reports and information presented to health trust boards and sub-groups. Non-executive directors and chairs reported being confident in the governance of their organisations and of the RBSCB. Health providers are set target dates for monitoring completion of SCR action plans to ensure that lessons are learnt and embedded into core practice. A requirement for records

audits is now specified in contracts for providers but this is still to be fully embedded.

47. There is an enthusiastic, committed and relatively stable workforce across the partnership and training is adequate overall. All staff who spoke to inspectors report a good range of training opportunities and Rochdale children's services is 'growing its own' to provide a career pathway to qualified social worker status. There is still scope to develop more specialised training for very experienced staff although some external training is available. In response to the findings of the unannounced inspection, an independent trainer was employed to provide risk assessment training for all social workers and managers. The training was of high quality and there is evidence of impact on practice. Social care staff report good access to supervision which is regular, supportive and challenging, but supervision files seen do not always provide evidence of this.

48. The quality of health training is generally good but no clear data on the number of health professionals trained on safeguarding are available, except in relation to CAMHS staff, where all staff are trained to the appropriate level. Almost all GPs in Rochdale have now attended RBSCB level 1 safeguarding training and good progress is now being made with the training of dentists, pharmacists and opticians. Staff reported they have good access to supervision from the dedicated and named nurses. While medical staff supervision is in place, this is more informal and on an individual case basis. Supervision is now recorded in the relevant health case record which enables practitioners to manage cases more effectively and provides an audit trail of inter-agency interventions with children and young people.

49. Workforce planning arrangements have not yet ensured that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced social workers to meet the needs of children in need in Rochdale, leading to a situation where unqualified staff have been conducting initial and core assessments and are undertaking statutory work with looked after children. Processes to ensure safe recruitment are good and exceed statutory minimum requirements, although this is not always clearly evidenced on some human resources files. A dedicated local authority designated officer (LADO) has been in post for eight weeks. Prior to this the core duties of the post were undertaken by IROs. The LADO is making good progress in dealing with the management of allegations but there has been insufficient time to engage effectively with voluntary, community and faith groups.

50. The quality of user engagement is good. Consultation with children, young people and their families, including those from vulnerable groups, is embedded in practice across council services. Their views have a notable influence on service design and delivery, including the planning of services provided through the Sure Start, Extended Schools and the Aim Higher programmes. Rochdale benefits from a highly effective youth council whose views are routinely sought

when the council is planning and developing services, including the re-design of the town centre.

51. The views of children on child protection plans and their parents are regularly sought through participation in child protection planning and there is some use of customer surveys. However, further work is required to ensure their views are taken account of at a strategic level.

52. While partnership working at a strategic level is adequate, there are some examples of good partnership working at the front line of services. Children's centres are delivering a range of early intervention and preventive services to families using family workers, health visitors, school nurses and midwives. Targeted youth services are working with secondary schools to provide support to more vulnerable children, access to a range of developmental activities and signposting to more specialist services where these are needed. Targeted support services are being developed in primary schools to ensure that children can access multi-agency support to prevent exclusions from school. The 'team around the child' approach has been developed to include a 'team around the school' and facilitates better multi-agency arrangements to support schools in the most deprived parts of the borough. The Sunrise team brings together the police, children's social care, health and sexual health services into a specialist team to support young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The team has been able to achieve some successes in identifying groups of young men acting as sexual predators and the police are working intensively to analyse and understand how best to prevent exploitation in the borough.

53. Five school-based police officers cover all secondary schools in the borough, providing support to schools and the local community in dealing with anti-social behaviour. This work is highly prized by schools and parents and has been very successful in reducing such behaviours. Police officers and school staff go out 'on patrol' together on occasions when neighbourhood difficulties are anticipated such as bonfire night, talking to young people on the street and encouraging them to behave responsibly. The youth offending team works well with the police, the youth service and young people's support team to support young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

54. There is some progress in take up of the common assessment framework (CAF) but difficulties remain. These include a lack of understanding amongst some agencies about the role of CAF compared with other referral mechanisms, and a reluctance to initiate a CAF if that means an individual worker would become the lead professional. In some cases workers from the voluntary and community sector have experienced difficulties bringing other agencies together even when taking the lead professional role. A revised Rochdale CAF was launched in April 2010 and take up is being monitored by the children's trust board.

55. Parents of children with learning disabilities and difficulties say their main concern is that there is no central contact point for information in relation to

services available. They report frustration at repeatedly having to tell their story to different professionals and complete multiple application forms to obtain a service.

56. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The corporate equality and diversity strategy is clearly linked to the children's agenda with an appropriate focus on equality and diversity in the CYPP. Good measures are taken to reduce barriers to participation, including a range of targeted and integrated leisure and sports activities for children and young people with learning disabilities and difficulties. There is good evidence of schools, early years services and partner agencies responding to the diverse need of communities with many initiatives delivered by the highly effective extended schools and youth services. A good strategy is in place to develop services for new and emerging communities including good targeting and development of resources through customer service consultation. The Fusion Programme delivered by the youth service is an outstanding example of the work done by the council to raise young people's awareness of community cohesion, equality and diversity.

57. Concerted efforts have been made to achieve value for money in the use of commissioned services with some success. Budgets are carefully monitored and remedial measures put in place where an overspend is predicted. The children's social care budget is facing particular difficulties currently with increased demand, new statutory requirements and some parts of the service already under-resourced. Budgets are not yet aligned or pooled but work is progressing on this. There are some effective tendering, contracting and purchasing arrangements. Additional resources have been allocated to the access and support team and the reconfiguration of the service may enable more effective and efficient use of resources already invested in the service.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

58. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is adequate. Statutory requirements are generally met across the service, although some looked after children are allocated to unqualified staff who act as the named worker. Staff have heavy caseloads with a high proportion of cases in care proceedings. Staff are satisfied with the level of supervision, training and support and enjoy working for the council. The service has an improvement plan with identified key objectives. However, some staff are not aware of the plan and there is a lack of a shared vision across the teams over what is important for looked after children. Commissioning arrangements are good and demonstrate that the service is seeking to deliver value for money.

59. There are some good developments in services for looked after children, for example the re-modelling project, the family group co-ordinator and the work of the child and family support team, and in particular the out-of-hours service. There are effective arrangements for young people to contribute to evaluation of services and service design. However, corporate parenting is under-developed and children in Rochdale are yet to benefit from the range of services and initiatives for looked after children which are evident in many other council areas. Three of the every child matters outcomes for looked after children are judged adequate and two are good.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

60. Capacity for improvement is adequate. A new management team is in place and the service was restructured in July 2009. These changes are having some positive impact. For example, locating all looked after children services together has led to improved relationships and decision making, although it is too early to see the full effect of this on service delivery and improvement. The children's services improvement plan was updated recently and some progress has been made on the key objectives. However, the increase in the looked after children population is putting pressure on resources and on the ability of the council and partners to provide effective services. The plans put in place to meet this need have yet to be realised.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- Ensure all looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker in line with statutory requirements.
- Ensure that strategic plans are shared with staff at all levels of children's services and that staff understand their role in meeting strategic targets.
- Prioritise the recruitment of foster carers to address the increasing demand for local placements.

Within three months:

- Ensure that corporate parenting is understood across the council and all partner agencies, and strengthen this function so that all looked after children and young people can fully achieve their potential.
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity within the IRO service to meet the requirements of the new statutory guidance in relation to looked after children and provide robust challenge to child protection plans and care plans.

Outcomes for children and young people

62. The health needs of looked after children and young people are adequately addressed overall. Looked after children health assessment files seen during the inspection were mainly of good quality, fully completed, with action plans in place and evidence that actions had been carried out in some cases. In a few cases there was evidence that some of the actions had not been followed by all health practitioners, such as the notification to foster carers of non-attendance at clinic appointments.

63. There has been a slight reduction in the proportion of young people having an annual health assessment but this is still above the national average, due to the increasing number of children that are looked after. Partners are aware of this and are taking appropriate action. For example, work is underway to ensure performance is more closely monitored and a dedicated named doctor has now been appointed. However, looked after children's dental needs are not met and too many children wait too long for dental appointments. The number of looked after children who remain unregistered with a dentist has increased since 2008. There has been a significant investment into dental services, but this is yet to have an impact.

64. Looked after children have good access to the full range of health services from a dedicated looked after children health team and they are able to provide

quicker access to a dedicated CAMHS team. Foster carers receive a good range of services to support them in meeting the emotional and physical well-being of children placed with them, and carers are offered individual tailored support and advice when they need it. This includes dedicated CAMHS workers, a specialist looked after children nurse, and an educational psychologist who regularly monitors progress of individual children and young people. This range of support is also available to the residential homes including the independent homes in Rochdale. CAMHS staff have close links with Early Break, the substance misuse service, ensuring timely referrals across the pathways for young people to access both services. The dedicated and highly valued young adult services help young people move to adult services at an appropriate time, while ensuring that their clinical and ongoing mental health needs can be met during the transition.

65. The specialist nurse for looked after children reports on service progress to Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale Community Healthcare Services. However this information is not incorporated into trust board health reports for other health providers in the area. When undertaking health assessments on children placed out of the area, the specialist nurse frequently faces difficulties accessing the health records, which causes delays in health assessments. The accident and emergency service information system at Rochdale Infirmary does not 'flag' children who are known to social care or who are looked after. The specialist nurse does not consistently receive information on looked after children who have attended unscheduled care for accidents, self-harm incidents and hospital admissions, and is therefore unable to follow up the children and young people after their attendance to ensure that all the health needs have been met. The specialist nurse is not represented on child protection advisory groups within the community health services or PCT, and therefore practice and safeguarding information are not shared systematically.

66. Looked after children live in safe placements. Good arrangements are in place to monitor the care of children and young people who are in external placements through the commissioning process, the work of the placement panel, contact with the advocacy service and regular visits from social workers. A strong focus on placement stability has resulted in good overall performance in this area. Care planning is adequate and the reviewing and visiting of looked after children are undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements. However, not all children and young people have a suitably qualified social worker. Safeguarding provision for looked after children is judged adequate or better in services and settings inspected.

67. The survey of looked after children conducted by the 'Listen Up' children in care council found that a high proportion of looked after children reported being bullied in school or in children's homes. In response to this the council commissioned the Children's Society to undertake work in children's homes and this has helped children and young people feel safer. Looked after children and young people who spoke to inspectors confirmed that they generally feel supported and safe in their placements, at school or college and in the

community in which they live. Multi-agency work with children missing from care is underpinned by a good strategy that has resulted in a reduction in the number of children and young people who go missing.

68. Educational support and outcomes for all looked after children including those placed outside the borough are adequate. The work of the looked after children achievement officer and the looked after children education support team is effective in co-ordinating services to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people in their education setting. The looked after children achievement officer maintains an up-to-date roll of the council's looked after children of school age and monitors the progress of individual pupils against their starting point. There is an improving trend in the educational attainment of looked after children at Key Stages 1 and 4, where the gap is narrowing between looked after children and all other children in Rochdale. In 2009 80% of looked after children in school year 11 obtained at least one GCSE or GNVQ, an improvement from 2008 when the figure was 66%. This compares favourably with the national figure where 68% of looked after children in year 11 obtained at least one GCSE or GNVQ in 2009, while 99% of all year 11 school children achieved this. At Key Stage 2, although there has been some improvement in attainment, this is yet to be sustained across all subject areas and the gap is not significantly narrowing.

69. Effective monitoring and management of school attendance for looked after children have resulted in a sustained reduction in the numbers missing school through exclusions or unauthorised absences over a three year period. A key feature of this strategy is the managed transfer system that prepares for a transfer of school or alternative when a young person's education placement is at risk of breaking down. Good consideration is given to the impact of a school move on placement stability. Despite improved education attendance by looked after children, the proportion of this group who attend alternative education provision remains higher than statistical neighbours and the national average.

70. The creative use of personal education allowances and extended school activities provide looked after children with individual tuition and good opportunities to participate in a range of sport and leisure activities. Personal education plans (PEPs) viewed by inspectors were of variable quality but adequate overall. Not all children and young people who should have a PEP currently, have one. The council has identified this as an area for development and work has begun to improve the quality and effectiveness of PEPs, including those for the youngest children. The achievement of looked after children is not routinely celebrated by the council and its partners. This is now recognised as an important area for development and a group of looked after children and young people with the support of the education achievement officer are currently planning the first looked after children achievement ceremony to be held later this year.

71. Opportunities for looked after children and care leavers to make a positive contribution are good. The Listen Up group successfully engages looked after

children and young people ensuring their views are listened to and acted upon at a strategic level. Although, small numbers attend the meetings their work has made a notable difference including action taken to address the bullying in schools and children's homes. Further work is required to ensure that this group is successful in capturing the views of the wider population of looked after children. Participation of looked after children and young people is well supported by youth empowerment workers and an advocacy worker and the Listen Up group is appropriately connected to the youth council. The Listen Up group is represented by a young person on the National Voice. This young person has undertaken the National Voice Lilac Training, which gives looked after children and young people locally the opportunity to contribute to the national agenda for looked after children.

72. Targeted work with looked after children and young people by the youth service ensures they are encouraged to participate in a range of youth activities and contribute to the wider agenda. There is good representation of looked after children and young people on all participation groups including the youth council and the children's council.

73. The youth offending service runs a range of projects designed to reduce offending by looked after young people and others in the community. Some of this work has contributed to reducing the numbers of young people becoming looked after. The youth offending service works closely with staff in the council's children's homes and has provided restorative justice training to residential care workers.

74. The contribution of services to improving the economic well-being of looked after children and care leavers is good. All care leavers have a high quality up-to-date pathway plan. A diverse range of post-16 provision is available within the borough including vocational programmes. The attendance, punctuality and attainment of care leavers in post-16 education are monitored well. Good support is offered by a range of professionals, including a resettlement worker and a connexions personal adviser; all care leavers have access to learning mentors. Timely and creative action is taken to keep care leavers engaged when there is a risk of disruption to education or training. Despite good destination planning the proportion of care leavers not in education, employment or training increased last year. The council is aware of the reasons for this and continues to work with this small cohort of care leavers with plans in place for some to return to education or training in September 2010.

75. Care leavers receive support from the looked after children specialist nurse during the transition period. The specialist nurse works flexibly and creatively to ensure that care leavers are able to maintain contact with health services and become increasingly able to manage their own health needs as they move towards independence.

76. A good range of accommodation, including supported lodgings and training flats, ensures care leavers are able to access accommodation that most suits their needs. Care leavers report they have good advice and support from a range of professionals to help their transition to independence and beyond. Three care leavers are currently studying at university and two more have been offered places for September 2010. The council's commitment to supporting care leavers to continue in education and training is demonstrated by the practical, financial support and encouragement they give young people to achieve which is over and above its statutory obligation.

77. Looked after children with learning disabilities and difficulties are supported well by all services during transition to adult services. Transition pathways are well planned, and good joint working with adult services ensures planning is based on individual needs. A local post-16 provider offers an alternative course for those with who do not want to remain in school but are not ready to participate in mainstream post-16 courses. The bridging course prepares this group of young people for entry into post-16 education through a tailor-made foundation course, with positive outcomes for those involved.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

78. Service responsiveness including dealing with complaints is adequate. Management information is used by some managers to identify patterns and trends in the looked after children population and to help shape service provision. The engagement of partners by the young people's support team has resulted in good outcomes for most care leavers. However, the service recognises that partnership working could be strengthened in care planning for younger children. High caseloads prevent social workers from engaging in frequent and high quality direct work with looked after children. Some of this work is undertaken by the social care workers and some good life story work was seen on files read by inspectors, with appropriate decision making in relation to placement arrangements and matching.

79. There is a shortage of foster carers and prospective adopters, which means too many children are placed outside the borough and children are waiting too long for adoptive families. The service has a recruitment and marketing strategy but this has not led to any demonstrable increase in the number of foster carers or adopters. Although most staff are aware of the acute need, there is insufficient urgency in pursuing this strategy.

80. All children who spoke to inspectors knew how to make a complaint and had confidence in the system. However, complaints information is not routinely collated and used to influence service design. The advocacy service provides good support to children and young people through their work with the children in care council and all children who qualify for an independent visitor have received appropriate services. Health professionals reported that whenever they had made complaints or representations on behalf of looked after children,

these were always acted upon promptly with appropriate action taken to safeguard the children when necessary.

81. Assessment and direct work with children and families are adequate. Assessments of children and young people who are on the edge of care are usually timely and thorough and identify the necessary actions to prevent the need for them to become looked after. However, managers in the looked after children services are not always clear why some children have been accommodated. The work of the family group conference co-ordinator, the re-modelling team and services provided through the Sure Start programme are all effective in supporting families.

82. While there have been delays in applying to discharge care orders that are no longer necessary, the work of the service in supporting carers to apply for special guardianship orders is noted as good practice. Managers acknowledged that in some cases planning and management oversight were not effective, resulting in drift for some children. However, some files seen during the inspection demonstrated care planning based on sound decision making, particularly with the more recent cases. Placement stability is good and all statutory reviews are held within timescales but there is insufficient capacity within the IRO system to ensure that the service effectively meet the needs of all children. Some of the paperwork generated by ICS is time consuming and not helpful to the care planning process.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

83. Leadership and management of the looked after children service are adequate. Corporate parenting is underdeveloped and children in Rochdale are yet to benefit from the range of services and initiatives that are evident in many other council areas. Councillors have not been given sufficient training opportunities to enable them to carry out their role effectively and provide an appropriate level of scrutiny and leadership or champion the needs of looked after children in Rochdale.

84. While there is a service plan in place this has not been communicated fully to staff and the relatively new management team has yet to convey the shared vision for the service to all staff. Performance targets are mostly met across the service. A recently introduced tool has proved effective in monitoring the activity of the looked after children team of social workers to ensure that statutory visits are undertaken and recorded and alert managers when these targets are not being met. The senior management team has identified weakness in performance management arrangements and has plans to improve in this area. Staff and foster carers have access to training which they value. The service provides good developmental opportunities to staff, including the child care award, and employs a mentor to work with foster carers on the standards set by the children's workforce development council.

85. Looked after children and young people report that they are listened to and can see how their views make a difference. Looked after children are

involved in staff recruitment at all levels of children's services. The Listen Up children in care council is active in seeking the views of looked after children making good use of surveys and feeding back the findings to the corporate parenting forum, although these meetings are not held on a regular basis. Their views are being used to improving the health information provided for children leaving care.

86. Although there is evidence of some good partnership working in front line services which results in adequate or better outcomes, there is less evidence that this is driven by an overall strategic plan led by the children's trust and the corporate parenting panel.

87. The Aim Higher programme has provided good opportunities for consultation with children with disabilities and they have been able to influence the range of activities provided including the increased opportunity to access respite care. This group of young people is well represented on the youth council and the children in care council and there are good opportunities to participate in targeted and mainstream leisure and sports activities. The IROs recognise the need to develop tools to ensure children with disabilities and communication disorders are able to make a positive contribution at their reviews. Within the fostering and adoption service, there is a clearly defined policy of matching and placing children with families that offer the most suitable placement and reflect the child's background, culture and origins. The commissioning and contract manager has established good working arrangements with a local service to provide residential accommodation to support looked after children with complex mental health needs ensuring they are suitably supported within their own community.

88. Robust systems are in place for the commissioning, monitoring and review of services to children and young people. A multi-agency placement panel agrees joint commissioning decisions promptly. While budgets are not pooled at this stage, the commitment to joint planning and commissioning is evident. A preferred providers list has driven down costs and improved competition among providers. The accredited scheme and links with Placements North West have strengthened quality assurance arrangements and increased value for money. Contracts are monitored by the contract officer and placement panels. The service produces budget forecasts for the year ahead, enabling early action to avoid overspend.

89. **Record of main findings: Rochdale**

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

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