

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Oldham

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Reporting inspector: Neil Penswick HMI

Age group: All
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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 three 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, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and young people's plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 51 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in January 2011
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff, executive officers from NHS Oldham, Oldham Community Health Services, Pennine Care Foundation NHS Trust and Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

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. Oldham is a metropolitan borough council on the north east of Greater Manchester. Oldham Borough Council covers an area of 142.2 square kilometres and contains a mixture of open countryside on the edge of the Pennines and the urban communities of Oldham, Failsworth & Hollinwood, Royton, Chadderton and Shaw. The Borough is currently ranked 37th most deprived out of 354 in England.
5. There are approximately 57,900 children and young people below the age of 19, which is 26.3% of the approximate total population of 219,800 of Oldham. This is a higher proportion than the national average of 22.4% of children and young people under the age of 19. The minority ethnic group of children and young people is also higher at 17.2% compared to 12.1% in England.
6. At the time of the inspection there were 328 children looked after in Oldham of which approximately 31% are aged 0 to 5 inclusive and 53% are aged 6 to 15 inclusive. Some 298 children were subject to Child Protection Plans and a total of 1463 children and young people were receiving a service from children's social care.
7. Children's social care services are delivered through a duty and assessment team, four long term child care teams, an aftercare team, a fostering and adoption team and a childcare disability multi-disciplinary team. The council also works in partnership with Positive Steps Oldham (PSO) an independent sector company providing an integrated range of services, including Connexions, Oldham Youth Offending Service and a Young People's Substance Misuse Service. .
8. Oldham has 103 state-funded schools comprising 87 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, three special schools and one pupil referral unit. Included within these numbers are one state-funded primary and six state-funded secondary schools that are academies. Oldham uses a virtual school approach supported by an Integrated Life Chances team to offer a range of services to enhance outcomes of children in care.
9. Oldham Children's Trust is the multi-agency strategic partnership charged with improving outcomes for children and young people. The key partners involved in the children's trust arrangements in Oldham are Oldham Council, NHS Oldham, Pennine Care Foundation NHS Trust, Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, schools and colleges (including academies), Greater Manchester Police (Oldham Division), Probation Service, Job Centre Plus and the voluntary, community and private sector.

10. Oldham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is a statutorily required body in its own right responsible for protecting children and young people in Oldham from harm and promoting their well-being. The LSCB brings together the same key organisations as outlined above and in addition CAFCASS, the Youth Offending Service and Oldham Housing.
11. Commissioning and planning of child and young peoples' health services and primary care are undertaken by NHS Oldham. Health visiting, school nursing and paediatric therapies and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have complex health needs are provided primarily by Oldham Community Health Services, part of the Pennine Care Foundation NHS Trust. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are also provided by the Pennine Care Foundation NHS Trust and acute hospital services, accident and emergency services (based at Royal Oldham Hospital) and maternity services are provided by the Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. Safeguarding and looked after children health services are commissioned through NHS Oldham and delivered by Oldham Community Health Services.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

12. The overall effectiveness of the council and its partners in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Oldham is good. Since 2009 and the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services for the local authority, there has been an ambitious programme to significantly improve services for the children, young people and their families in Oldham. This has been supported by the introduction of robust financial and performance management systems.
13. Strategic partnership work through the Children's Trust Board and the Oldham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is excellent. The Children and young people's plan is outstanding, developed through a comprehensive needs analysis of the borough and consultation with stakeholders and users of the services. An annual review provides an honest overview of the areas of progress and the challenges still to be resolved. The local authority, health services and their partners know themselves well. The Director of Children's Services provides an inspirational lead for the partnership and is spoken of highly across Oldham.
14. Excellent consultation arrangements with children and young people underpin the good relationship between the authority and some of its most vulnerable service users. Regular 'Question Time' type panels between the Director and local councillors and young people provide very good challenge to the priorities and quality of services. An excellent Corporate Safeguarding Accountability Board ensures ownership across the council of the wider safeguarding agenda.
15. In the local health services there are good, mature relationships and partnerships seen from the executive to front line workers. High levels of collaboration between organisations and individual practitioners focus on the child's needs. Children's services are seen as a priority within the change programmes occupying the health organisations at this time and funding has been protected. Annual reports comply with statutory guidance and are subject to good levels of scrutiny with action plans effectively monitored. However there are some weaknesses in frontline practice, there are insufficient numbers of qualified children's nurses at Royal Oldham Hospital accident and emergency department and it does not have dedicated waiting and minor treatment areas for children or young people, also compliance with safeguarding training is variable, with Pennine Acute Hospitals only achieving 33% of staff trained and this is inadequate.
16. Joint commissioning and workforce development are appropriately located in both strategic partnerships and are excellent. A programme to up-skill

the children's services workforce through high quality training, e-learning and mentorship is working well. Performance management systems set annual targets which are ambitious and better than for national and similar authorities. However the work of the local authority emergency duty team is not subject to the same performance management scrutiny and this is inadequate. Performance management systems for safeguarding are good overall but quality assurance is not as well developed.

17. Children and young people's views inform strategic planning and they have been at the centre of developments to improve road safety and e-safety and to tackle bullying, including homophobic and race hate crimes. The voluntary, community and private sector is involved at strategic and operational level in service delivery: for instance the excellent work done by Positive Steps Oldham including its management of the Voluntary Sector Hub.
18. There is clear evidence of demonstrable improvements to safeguarding services to ensure that children and young people are safe in Oldham. Most of the performance indicators are very good and show significant improvements. There are examples of excellent practice including the work of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The innovative project to support children at the risk of sexual exploitation is good. All of the issues identified in the Ofsted unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment in January 2011 have been addressed. A single children's assessment team (CAT) ensures contacts and referrals are received and responded to promptly by qualified social workers, and are appropriately prioritised and allocated. There is regular and effective use of a risk assessment tool which has been introduced in order to clearly highlight to families areas of risk and protective factors. The flexible range of skills, scale of the team, effective interventions and good transfer arrangement to the four long term teams result in caseloads being realistic with no unallocated work. A new electronic recording system has been purchased, trialled widely and will be fully implemented in June 2012.
19. Partnership work on an operational level is generally of a good quality. Assessments are in the main good, however this is not consistent in all cases. Strategy meetings, child protection conferences and core groups to evaluate risk and make plans to safeguard children are of a high standard. However thresholds for child protection services are high and some cases are inappropriately dealt with as children in need. This does not meet the requirements in the national guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, 2010. There is also a high percentage of children made subject to a further child protection plan following repeat incidents of harm and the reasons for this are currently being researched by the local authority. No children were seen by inspectors to have been left at risk.

20. There is a wide and expanding range of family support services. The common assessment framework (CAF) is widely used and understood and the learning has led to further developments with adult services. The quality of these services is high, for instance the family group conferences, the work within the children's centres and the neighbourhood panels to support complex families with multiple needs.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 1 (outstanding)

21. The capacity for improvement is outstanding. The Children and young people's plan, which is reviewed on an annual basis, is excellent and articulates well the vision, ambition and priorities to deliver sustained improvements across children's services. The local authority, health and partners have an outstanding track record of achievement. Since 2009 the authority has put in significant effort and focused on improving its performance. This is now demonstrated in outstanding judgements in the Ofsted fostering and regulatory inspections and in the 'performs excellently' judgements in the children's services assessments of 2010 and 2011. All children's performance indicators have ambitious local targets and are, in the main, showing continued improvements. The inspection judgments for the local schools, children's centres and children's homes have shown continual improvement overall. Most safeguarding judgements of these settings are now outstanding.
22. The Children's Trust and the LSCB are excellent partnerships coordinating highly effective multi-agency services. Joint commissioning is outstanding with an excellent track record of developing services and improving outcomes whilst delivering service efficiencies. The supportive documents for these partnerships show a good understanding of their strengths and areas that need further development. Children, young people and families are significantly involved in strategic and operational planning through participation in partnership boards and meetings making decisions over their own lives. All of the children and young people interviewed by inspectors as part of this inspection report high levels of satisfaction with the services received.
23. Since 2009 the newly appointed Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services have focused on improving performance through excellent financial control and partnership working. Robust management information collected by the local authority clearly demonstrates that for most indicators performance has significantly improved. There is an ambitious programme of developing children in need services in partnership with the community and voluntary sectors – and these are mostly of high quality – with an excellent training and support network aimed at up-skilling the children's services workforce. Workforce development is excellent and has increased the capacity of children's services and made significant improvements to the safeguarding agenda.

There are now a rising number of children and young people receiving support through the very good children in need services.

24. There is an excellent understanding of the needs of the different communities within Oldham and this is reflected in the substantial needs analysis that underpins the children and young people's plan. Significant partnership work with the ethnic minority communities in Oldham has resulted in improvements in the safety of children in the local area. For instance, the work with madrassahs and imams to raise the awareness of child protection issues is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

25. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, the local health providers and partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure that enquiries conducted under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 follow the national guidance in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, 2010 to ensure that children are protected from harm

Within three months:

- ensure the local authority Emergency duty team is subject to the same performance management systems as the daytime services
- Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust should ensure that all staff that require Level 2 and 3 safeguarding training receive this training and remain up to date with their training
- Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust should ensure that all children and young people who use Royal Oldham A&E department are protected from harm, that their privacy and dignity is maintained and that nothing impedes the building of the dedicated children facility.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 2 (good)

26. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are good. Most children and young people report that they feel safe in Oldham. Some 87% of children and young people responding to the Care4Me survey as part of the preparation for this inspection reported that they feel safe and that they have an adult with whom they can speak, and this is good. However a small minority of the children and young people met by inspectors stated that they felt unsafe in particular areas of Oldham at night, including the town centre.
27. Parents and foster carers using children's centres told inspectors of the excellent work being undertaken by children's centres, the local authority, and the Police to promote community cohesion, for example in addressing racial bullying. There is a strong investment in ensuring that children's centres are well used by members of minority ethnic communities and that services being provided are culturally sensitive. Improvements have been made to ensure the safety of children and young people in parks after this was identified as a priority following consultation by the local authority.
28. All regulated social care settings and schools are judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding for safeguarding. The council has a good understanding of the challenges in ensuring that private fostering arrangements are widely known about in the community and that appropriate support and safeguarding measures are provided. This has encouraged a rise in numbers identified over the past year from seven to 13, although in most of these cases the council was not notified until the child had been in the country for over two years.
29. Good training and advice is provided for special needs education coordinators (SENCOs) and designated teachers for child protection to manage the behaviour of children and young people. E-safety training is rated highly. The excellent increase in school attendance from 91% to 95% is reported by school staff to have resulted from the 'Ready Steady School' initiative which identifies potentially vulnerable children at points of transition between key stages and between schools. A Child Employment and Entertainment Licensing Officer works well with schools to ensure that statutory regulations for children and young people employed are met, that they are not exploited and are kept safe.

30. The role of the LADO is well established and makes an exceptional contribution to the safeguarding of children and young people in Oldham, through ensuring allegations against staff are investigated promptly and thoroughly to a very high standard. Health and other agencies, including from the voluntary and community sectors, widely understand the function of the role due to the comprehensive programme of training provided, and speak highly of the effectiveness of the post holder, for instance the work in addressing homophobic bullying in schools. Partnership work with faith and minority ethnic community organisations is supporting a growing range of creative safeguarding initiatives and is showing good sensitivity to cultural and religious needs, for instance the recent publication of a safeguarding guide for madrassahs.
31. There is strongly integrated strategic and operational practice between the messenger partnership, working with children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation, and the missing children group who oversee work with children and young people missing from home and care. Protocols are well written and robust. There are good linkages between staff responsible for monitoring children missing from school and children and young people educated at home. This ensures a good sharing of intelligence within Oldham and with neighbouring authorities. The multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) are working well, with well attended meetings by all partners and prompt risk assessments.
32. Child protection investigations are undertaken rigorously, with good multi-agency commitment to attending planning and review meetings. In the cases scrutinised inspectors saw good evidence of clear decision making to safeguard children and young people including effective work to involve them and their parents and carers in actions taken. In a small number of cases child protection concerns had been inappropriately dealt with as children in need. There is a very good level of safeguarding knowledge and experience within agencies in Oldham due to a considerable investment in training. However, the increasing level of responsibility held by partners for assessing or supporting children and families who are potentially exposed to child protection concerns does not meet the requirements of national guidance for these cases to be investigated by the local authority.
33. The corporate children's services complaints process is used well to inform service improvement. Regular and effective communication between the LADO, the corporate parenting manager, the participation officer and the advocacy service ensures that learning from complaints is fully disseminated.
34. Recruitment procedures within the council are safe and meet statutory minimum requirements. Although not required to do so, the council does not routinely require members of staff to renew criminal records bureau

(CRB) checks every three years as a best practice measure to ensure all possible steps are taken to protect children and young people. However the council does routinely require social work staff to renew their CRB checks every three years. All health organisations follow the safer recruitment good practice guidance. Further, with the exception of Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, all other organisations actively review the CRB clearance status of all employees every three years.

Quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

35. The quality of provision overall is good.
36. Early intervention services are good. Projects such as the two family intervention projects, family group conferencing and the messenger partnership and the support provided by children's services family support workers, CAF and targeted adult services work well to support children and young people to remain safe at home. Commissioning arrangements ensure that targets are realistic and focused on helping prevent statutory intervention. The focus of children's centres on helping families become more economically active and to tackle child poverty contributes well to early intervention, with good quality health and financial advice freely accessible.
37. The use of CAF in Oldham is well embedded, with clear thresholds and good use of escalation to, and de-escalation from, child in need or child protection plans. The CAF system is managed very effectively and six coordinators link well to district and extended services. Due to a recognised increase in their effectiveness there has been a 75% increase in the use of CAFs from 2010 to 2011 of 550 to 965 per year and there has been a reduction in the proportion of cases referred to children's social care over the same period from 14% to 6%. Arising from the good learning from using the CAF, a 'family CAF' model has been developed to provide support for families with mental health problems and a 'family CAF plus' model developed in order to work with families who are hard to engage. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these models.
38. Good work is being done to promote safety in Oldham. Since 2009 three e-safety weeks have been run annually to raise awareness of children and parents of safety concerns; evaluation shows that awareness is increasing year-on-year. The LSCB has recently run an anti-bullying conference and followed this with a programme of workshops for children and young people in schools. Young carers also spoke highly to inspectors of the services that support them.
39. NHS Oldham and Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust have audited the reasons for children and young people attending A&E in Oldham with the aim of preventing unintentional injuries. Themes identified, such as burns, poisoning and ingesting foreign bodies are to be incorporated into the

prevention strategy. A 'dashboard' method has also been developed with GP practices on how they will manage frequent attendees.

40. There has been a significant investment in child protection training of religious teachers and leaders, and awareness raising within faith communities. Resources are widely available and in accessible formats, and plans continue to evolve to ensure that different faith groups and teaching staff, including those working more informally and who are detached from formal organisations and structures, are also involved..
41. Thresholds are clear and, although high, are widely understood and supported by health and partner agencies, with the LSCB keeping them under regular review. Management oversight of decision making is generally well evidenced.
42. Oldham performs very well in relation to the timeliness of initial and core assessments in relation to neighbouring authorities and nationally, consistently exceeding average figures by a large margin. There is excellent involvement from partner agencies and with children and young people. Inspectors saw tenacity and imaginative practice by social workers when engagement with parents proved difficult. However in a number of cases there had not been sufficient early engagement with members of the extended family to enable a comprehensive assessment of protective factors. Pre-birth assessments and planning are comprehensive, mostly timely, and completed to a high standard. The use of chronologies is good. Record keeping is generally up to date however it is not consistently of a good quality. Problems arising from having to maintain dual electronic and paper recording systems are being addressed through the implementation of a new electronic system in May 2012 following extensive consultation and trialling with future users.
43. The threshold for child protection involvement is high. Inspectors saw a number of cases where it had been inappropriately decided to follow a child in need pathway where there were clear child protection concerns. No children were seen to be at risk from these practices but these actions do not meet the requirements in the national guidance in *Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2010*. In the majority of these cases the social work and management decision making was not clearly recorded.
44. Police officers from the Greater Manchester Public Protection Investigation Unit do not attend initial or review child protection case conferences. This role is allocated to a separate team who have no prior knowledge of the case. The impact of this lack of continuity of key personnel directly involved with a child or young person on the quality of decision making has not been assessed.
45. Child protection and child in need plans are mostly well focused with clear timescales, although the quality is variable. At the time of the inspection, approximately 20% of all children subject to a child protection plan had

previously been subject to a plan. The LSCB has commissioned work in order to develop an understanding of why there are high numbers of children and young people on repeat plans and this is on-going.

46. Child protection reviews are timely and are effective at monitoring the work undertaken. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) report that social work analysis has improved since the introduction of the risk assessment process. IROs have developed the use of different communication tools, which includes the use of white boards, projectors and pictorial displays, in order to ensure that adults with learning disabilities attending conferences can fully participate and this is excellent practice.
47. The distribution of the minutes at the end of core group meetings, introduced 18 months ago, has led to significant improvements in the ownership and implementation of actions and better engagement by parents. Meetings are well attended, regular and strongly outcome focused.
48. The quality of care proceedings has improved significantly over the past three years. The council's legal services confirm that decision making in long term and complex neglect cases is now reliable leading to better outcomes for children and young people. Judges, lawyers and family members have complimented the council on the high quality of assessments, and no report has been challenged since the system began operating. Good use is being made of the Public Law Outline although a majority of cases end up in proceedings due to the highly complex nature of many of the issues needing to be addressed.
49. The emergency duty team provides an integrated service to support adult and children's services. The experienced team is effective in providing a prompt, reliable, well used and respected response to effectively support day time children's social care teams. Communication with day time colleagues is prompt. There are close working relationships with partner agencies and staff have good access to relevant training. However there is currently no performance management or monitoring of workloads and trends in the use of the service and this is a weakness.
50. There is good access within all social work teams to the two highly skilled 'language' workers. Joint work with social workers and partner agencies ensures assessments, child protection investigations and support to children, young people and their families fully addresses language, cultural, religious and heritage needs. There is a strong commitment to offering continuity of support to vulnerable young people, which includes for instance, maintaining regular contact with young people at risk of forced marriage after they leave the country and undertaking assessment visits overseas.

The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe Grade 2 (good)

51. The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe is good. Health visiting, school nursing, midwifery and accident and emergency services are effective across Oldham. Senior health services' management involvement is evident in all strategic partnerships including the Children's Trust and LSCB.
52. Senior managers from the various health organisations contribute significantly to the Children's Trust and LSCB and their membership meets national requirements. Designated and named health professionals fulfil their statutory roles on these boards. Ongoing and time-limited working groups have good health involvement and these ensure the monitoring, development and review of the services for children across Oldham. The recent serious case review had appropriate health contributions.
53. The arrangements for the named and designated professionals across Oldham meet the requirements of the national standards in the Intercollegiate Guidance and *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, 2010. All safeguarding policies are up to date and are aligned to the local safeguarding children boards for which the health providers operate (some cover four or more LSCBs).
54. There are effective communication structures in place with children and young people to express their views within services provided by Pennine Care Foundation NHS Trust (PCFT) and in the substance misuse, complex needs services and the sexual health services. The latter has gained the 'You're Welcome' standard accreditation. One of the commissioning and quality innovations (CQUIN) is to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and influences services and there has been good progress made in achieving this.
55. There are mature and robust partnership arrangements with co-located staff and joint appointments between health and social care, which are promoting early identification and sharing of concerns and ensure that children and young people are protected from harm. There is good use made of the safeguarding health 'hot line' and highly visible and valued safeguarding designated and named professionals. There is also good evidence of supportive supervision for primary care and community practitioners in ensuring that children and young people's needs are being identified and actioned. The capacity of the designated nurse for safeguarding to drive forward leadership of safeguarding across all providers though is limited due to the joint function of the post as the associate director for quality and clinical governance. There is good use of the local safeguarding arrangements within the commissioned dental services.

56. Accident and emergency services at Royal Oldham Hospital, part of Pennine Acute Hospital NHS Trust, does not have dedicated areas for children or young people and there is one resuscitation room which is currently being used as a multi-purpose treatment room. There are insufficient numbers of qualified children's nurses to work with children in the accident and emergency department, resulting in a lack of children's expertise throughout all shifts. All staff have received training in children's pain management, and receive paediatric life support training. There is good rate of compliance with safeguarding training, including foundation years doctors. There are good systems in place ensuring that primary and community staff receive information on children, young people and pregnant women who attend accident and emergency.
57. Compliance with safeguarding training is variable, with Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust only achieving 33% of staff trained at Level 2 at Royal Oldham Hospital (40% trust wide) and this is inadequate. Of those GPs interviewed, all were in date with their Level 3 safeguarding training. The evaluation of the impact of training in practice is not consistent across all health providers. There is good use of the 'safeguarding walkabouts' at Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. Safeguarding training at Pennine Care Foundation Trust shows high levels of compliance with 96% of staff in date with Level 2 training across the trust. All staff reported good access to safeguarding supervision and good access to the named and designated health staff for safeguarding.
58. There are highly accessible and well used sexual health services. Although the rate of teenage conceptions remains above the national average, the rate of decline has been significant and better than comparators. There is good collaboration and complementary services provided for young people, including those from different cultures who are well supported to access the contraception and sexual health (CASH) and other services including termination of pregnancy services.
59. There is good support for those children and young people with disabilities and/or life limiting conditions and their families. The robust single point of access and referral using the 'family CAF' approach is proving to be successful in improving access to services. The complex needs service staff are all co-located, resulting in improved information and communication flows. Effective use of resources has enabled waiting lists to be reduced and more children and young people to have timely access to services.
60. Safeguarding referral thresholds are well understood and health thresholds are aligned which has improved the rate of referral acceptance. There is very good monitoring and quality assurance of referrals from all named practitioners. 'Cause for concern' forms are used effectively and can, through robust reporting structures, identify issues and trends within families. Notifications of attendance at accident and emergency settings,

which are sent to primary care, community care and the safeguarding health teams, are also mapped to 'cause for concern' forms, and frequent attendee information to identify and address any safeguarding or health concerns. General practitioners interviewed reported that they are able to submit timely reports to case conferences if they are unable to attend, with good timely circulation of minutes of meetings to ensure follow up action is taken promptly.

61. Themes identified from other local Child Death Overview Panels (CDOP) are also shared and reviewed locally. However, the communication of information from both the LSCB and CDOP is not robust within primary care: GPs met by inspectors reported that they were not aware of the CDOP campaigns, apart from a recently commenced programme of work in relation to the impact of consanguinity on child mortality. The latter programme of work has been agreed with the local faith leaders and Imams who are well engaged in the finding ways to resolve concerns.
62. Substance misuse services have been a focus of attention due to a local priority to reduce the number of children intoxicated by alcohol, with new posts such as the A&E liaison nurse being appointed. However it is too early to judge impact. There are effective pathways in place for referral to CAMHS, including access intensive care (tier 4) beds.
63. There is outstanding health engagement with MARAC. Use of domestic violence notifications which do not meet the MARAC thresholds are effectively followed up by community and maternity practitioners. Maternity staff ensure that pregnant women are asked alone if they have any concerns including whether they are being subject to domestic violence.
64. There are effective pathways in place to refer to the out of area/regional sexual assault referral centre (SARC). As a result of the messenger partnership service, high risk young women and men are referred to sexual health services and are given a good level of, and on going, support. Increasing numbers of young men are accessing these services, although rates are still low.
65. The dental service has introduced a flagging system to track and monitor families and children of concern, however the effectiveness of this is yet to be audited. Those children who missed appointments are now referred to health visitors or school nursing services who follow up these families, ensuring that the young child is protected from harm. Good use is made of the dental hygiene packs to improve dental care and oral hygiene. Literature has been provided in a range of languages to improve rates within non English speaking communities. Dental staff have also worked with various faith groups and produced health promotion materials such as 'smile with the prophet' to improve dental hygiene.

66. Oldham is one of only two towns in the country to be awarded UNICEF baby friendly status. There are a range of well accessed breast feeding groups and peer support, rates of breast feeding have improved and initiation rates are now at 68%, which includes an increasing number of teenaged parents now breastfeeding. There is a well established infant feeding service with dedicated staff for those who are classified as 'hard to reach'. There are now personal health lessons dedicated for Asian young women that include breastfeeding, to improve understanding and future compliance rates.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 1 (outstanding)

67. Ambition for the safety of children and young people in Oldham is outstanding and is reflected in the priorities for service delivery set by the partnership as a whole. Services for children are a key priority for the local authority and the Children's Trust. The local authority and partners provide an effective, ambitious and articulate response to take forward the key strengths and tackle weaknesses in the services.
68. The Children's Trust has been instrumental in breaking down the silo mentality between agencies and this has led to innovative strategic and operational multi-agency practice. Leadership by the Trust is strong. Senior managers, especially from children's social care, have acted as strong and effective role models for crossing professional and agency boundaries over the past two years through regular attendance at different agency meetings.
69. The local authority has invested in new technology, improved commissioning arrangements and new strategies to intervene in complex families. For instance through community budgets delegated to the six districts in Oldham, contracts focused on 'payment by results' and broader education pilots. Through the good performance management arrangements the local authority has largely been successful in improving the performance of its children's services. Structured finance has been used to bring additional investment in to the borough to resource the community, voluntary and health sectors in order to deliver services alongside those provided by the local authority.
70. The Corporate Safeguarding Accountability panel established in August 2009 as a prompt response to the Laming Review of Child Protection ensures high level council leadership accountability for safeguarding. The panel ensure implications of council safeguarding inspection outcomes and LSCB priorities are understood and being acted upon. The responsibilities of panel members are clearly delineated, and there is good evidence of the panel providing opportunities for senior managers to meet with frontline practitioners to enable current safeguarding concerns and issues, including resources, to be openly discussed.

71. There is excellent cross-agency, health and council services sign-up to the draft targeted intervention and prevention strategy for children, young people and families. The strategy and evolving plans are ambitious, coherent and transformational in their aim to give families with complex needs the skills and the opportunity through family panels to influence how targeted neighbourhood support can be shaped to better meet their needs and achieve lasting change for all members of the family.
72. Young people told inspectors that elected members are strongly supportive of the needs and aspirations of children and young people and these are being addressed well in Oldham. For instance, following the termination of the nationally funded Youth Opportunity Fund, this was replaced by the local authority with the 'Kerching' fund, which is managed by children and young people to provide grants for local projects.

Leadership and management

Grade 1 (outstanding)

73. Leadership and management are outstanding. There is impressive leadership from the Director of Children's Services who chairs the Children's Trust and ensures a strong focus and buy-in across agencies. Senior representatives from partner agencies form the main board. There are no formal pooled budgets but agreements are in place to share financial responsibilities and planning. The LSCB provides excellent leadership on the coordination and delivery of services to ensure children are safe in Oldham. The local strategic partnership has been reformed to a public services board with a good range of representation from all public sectors in Oldham.
74. The children and young people's plan is outstanding, developed through a thorough and high quality needs analysis of the communities within Oldham. The plan is reviewed on an annual basis across the children's sector organisations. It focuses exceptionally well around improving outcomes for all children and young people in Oldham and includes an honest and detailed analysis of the impact achieved and the further work needing to be undertaken. Individual service plans for the single agencies link closely in to this vision.
75. At a time of reductions in budgets nationally and locally, financial resources are used effectively with a commitment to maintaining frontline services. Strategic and operational partnership arrangements have also resulted in the expansion of earlier support for those most vulnerable families. There are many instances of agencies focusing on their joint responsibilities, of carrying out analysis together and then investing in redesigned services. This has allowed a sharper focus on improving outcomes for service users and efficiency savings for those organisations. This includes work on specific areas of needs and provision such as teenage pregnancy work, CAMHS and children's centres and also individual budgets for those children and young people with the most

severe disability and complex needs. The joint commissioners are reviewing the health visitor services in line with revised national guidance to commission a new universal service. Through good communication and partnership working such issues as the need to review transitions for young people to adult health services has resulted in the formation of a transition forum to improve access to services.

76. There has been significant improvement in the morale in children's services over past three years, from the time when agency workers were heavily used, to the current situation with only one agency worker in the teams. Training is of high quality with career progression considered well and access to post qualifying (PQ) child care courses for more experienced staff. Workers spoken to by inspectors reported that there is a good level of corporate and service management communication.
77. Weaknesses and resource deficits have been tackled robustly in the past and resulted in good performance, and much outstanding performance is now demonstrated. This is seen in the 'performs excellently' in the Ofsted children's services assessment in 2010 and 2011, the overall and safeguarding judgments in the inspections of fostering and regulated settings, and in the improvements in the performance of many of the national indicators.
78. The action plan in response to the serious case review (SCR), commissioned in January 2010, is excellent. It resulted in substantial learning throughout the partnership and significant improvements within and between agencies in terms of safeguarding practice. The author of the SCR report provided extensive first hand feedback to the agencies which has contributed to the high quality of multi-agency cooperation and development of new procedures, for example in the new joint parenting assessment of care leavers conducted by the leaving care team and health practitioners.
79. Work to develop the children's sector workforce is excellent with strong links to the wider children's services partnerships and to the council. The integrated children's workforce activity group (ICWAG) is outstanding. It works to both the LSCB and the Children's Trust, and represents all the organisations in the children's sector with a focus on developing a 'community of learning' and building capacity in the workforce. Through its work it has ensured an up-skilling of the workforce through a range of training, e-learning and mentorship. In addition to the training for children's services staff, there have also been courses for a range of workers across the council, such as for repairmen who may identify issues about vulnerable people in their contact with the public. There is a foundation level course for personnel within 'parks and gardens'. This is due to children and young people being consulted on their priorities and identifying that they felt unsettled in some of the parks. Young people have also been involved in designing and delivering training. One example

is of young people delivering anti-bullying and designing e-safety training in schools.

80. Focused workforce development has resulted in a reduction of the use of the agency staff within the council's children's services over three years from 48% of all posts to only one post at the time of the inspection. This is excellent. There is also very good support to all newly qualified staff, including frequent supervision, protected caseloads, access to training and opportunities to shadow child protection and other complex work. Staff commented to inspectors that the organisation took health and safety considerations seriously in terms of prioritising co-working and that it felt a safe organisation to belong to in terms of exposure to new and challenging situations. Good corporate communication was described, including from the Chief Executive and senior managers within children's social care services, ensuring that staff felt included in decision making and aware of the challenges and opportunities facing the organisation. The composition of the social work teams reflect the needs of the local communities, and in the front line child assessment team 30 different dialects are spoken.
81. Two full time 'language' workers have been based within the social work children's assessment team for five years, although they work across all of the fieldwork teams. This ensures that up to 10 languages are available from skilled practitioners who are able to work alongside social workers undertaking all levels of complexity and provide consistency with children and parents for whom English is not their first language. Language workers are well trained, and have been centrally involved in developing innovative projects within the local minority ethnic community using good levels of sensitivity, for instance development work into home based tutoring within the Muslim community.
82. The level of engagement by children and young people in Oldham in strategic consultation, planning and the development of new initiatives is outstanding. Senior managers across a range of health and council services and other partners, including the Greater Manchester Police, meet regularly with the Youth Council, and are consulted about key decisions for services that affect them. Young inspectors have been trained to inspect children's social care services, such as short break residential homes, and this has brought about practical improvements to the service. They are also expanding their remit to include schools and health settings. Members of the Youth Parliament, the Youth Mayor, members of the Youth Council, Barrier Breakers and the Children in Care Council are well connected to regional and national young people's forums, and have good governance arrangements which ensure that groups are representative of the majority of the diverse communities within Oldham. Major initiatives include an influential road safety campaign which has attracted significant local, regional and national interest, publicity and awards, and the Mahdlo youth resource centre which is shortly to open and will provide a

comprehensive and ambitious range of arts, crafts and sports activities. Plans are well advanced for a mental health awareness campaign for young people following extensive consultation with children and young people.

83. In the health organisations there are high levels of collaboration between organisations and individual practitioners with the focus remaining on the child's needs. This has resulted in the creation of a number of joint commissioner posts to take forward the planning across the partnerships. There are high levels of challenge and scrutiny from Children's Trust and the LSCB including the sub groups, some of which are chaired by health managers and commissioners. The Director of Public Health is now a core independent member on these boards and this has provided another level of challenge and scrutiny. Services for children are seen as a priority in health and local authority and remain so despite all the organisations undergoing significant changes; funding is being protected.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 2 (good)

84. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are good.
85. Performance management is established across the partnership. Targets are set on an annual basis. In many cases these are ambitious and exceed national and similar authorities' performance. The Oldham Council children's services performance management information is shared with the Chief Executive and across the council services, with members, strategic partnerships (Children's Trust and LSCB) and within children's services. This provides opportunities for performance challenge within the council and across the partnerships. Performance management systems have assisted greatly in improving the timeliness of many aspects of children's work, however there has not been a similar focus on improving the quality of work. Evaluation overall is not as well developed in children's services and across the partnerships and there is less focus on quality assurance, and user surveys and feedback. In a small number of areas work has been slow to tackle performance weaknesses, for instance in relation to the high incidence of children being subject to a child protection plan following repeat incidents of significant harm.
86. Supervision is held at monthly intervals with good opportunities for reflective learning and performance and practice challenged well. Supervision records are produced promptly in both electronic and in hard copy format within two days. Personal and career development, support and training needs are well addressed. Staff universally report that line management is 'excellent' with good cover arrangements and accessible high quality senior management support. Appraisals are updated at six-monthly intervals and those seen were mostly of a good standard which is a significant improvement since the unannounced inspection of 2011.

Support to newly qualified social workers including protected caseloads and mentorship is excellent.

87. There is good use made by first line managers of data to manage their teams. Team managers have access to service wide performance information. This includes material on assessment performance. There is a regular service wide team manager's performance meeting.
88. Regular case audits are undertaken throughout the year by managers at all levels with learning arising evaluated periodically by senior managers and used to inform service planning. Most of the work seen by inspectors was of a good standard. However audits undertaken by the council as part of this inspection did not always identify the weaknesses and omissions evident in a small number of cases. Multi-agency auditing by the LSCB has recently started, but it is too early to judge effectiveness. There is good oversight of learning from audits by the Children's Trust. Section 11 audits are regularly undertaken, and improvements have been recently made to enable those agencies working across Greater Manchester to only have to complete one set of audit documentation.
89. In health there is good use made of the children and young people's plan and joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA) with the highly effective use of the commissioning and quality innovations (CQUIN) which are viewed as being key drivers for change. Recently positive changes as a result of CQUINs have been the increased use of CAF and 'family CAF' as well ensuring that the 'voice of the child' is being heard and influencing decision making at all levels within and across organisations. There are good governance structures within health monitoring 'RAG' (red, amber and green risks) rated concerns including those identified within the section 11 safeguarding audits and/or the North West Safeguarding standards. Learning from the serious case review has been thorough and is embedded.

Partnership working

Grade 1 (outstanding)

90. Partnership working is outstanding with an excellent safeguarding children board, providing an ambitious vision and highly effective coordination of safeguarding arrangements in Oldham. The LSCB fulfils its statutory functions well and provides effective leadership for the targeted and wider safeguarding agenda. The Children's Trust arrangements are good, coordinating well the wider vision of improving all of children's life chances in Oldham. The community and voluntary sector are involved well in strategic planning of services.
91. The Children and young people's plan articulates the vision and the resource allocation of the Children's Trust and its partner organisations. It provides a single point of accountability and is reviewed on an annual

basis, covering both universal and targeted provision. Performance is reported following the identified priorities. Sub groups, such as the ICWAG which has joint accountability to the LSCB, plays a significant role in promoting different ways of working and modelling shared strategic leadership across agencies.

92. The Children's Trust provides added value and authority for the prioritising of safeguarding by working alongside the LSCB to ensure a focus on sensitive issues such as on the impact of consanguinity on child development and mortality and child protection issues within madrassahs. The excellent 'every life matters' road safety initiative was brought to the Children's Trust board before it went to the LSCB and as a result received financial support.
93. The LSCB has good representation of key agencies at board and sub group level, including the voluntary sector and lay members and provides excellent leadership on safeguarding. There are good links with the Children's Trust through joint membership of some members, and mutual challenge and accountability. For instance performance management information from the LSCB is scrutinised and challenged by the Children's Trust. There is increasing joint engagement with the Adult Safeguarding Board, supported by joint membership and co-location and strong links with the Youth Council with joint projects on road and e-safety safety. There is excellent evidence of multi-agency projects arising from Board initiatives such as the circumcision initiative which is now being implemented across Greater Manchester. Funding of the Board is secure.
94. There is strong operational and strategic multi-agency working to prevent offending led by the Youth Offending Services (YOS) an independently commissioned service. Intensive multi-disciplinary support for high risk offenders is also provided, with a good success rate at preventing repeat offending. The YOS has successfully addressed weaknesses identified within its inspection by the Criminal Justice Board, including developing a specific programme for working with young people convicted of race crime, and through improved use of resources from agencies that are co-located within the Positive Steps Oldham network.
95. There is good governance through the multi-agency domestic violence partnership and regular reporting to the LSCB. Strategic changes achieved include the redefining of the reduction of the age criteria for receipt of services to 16 from 18 in response to trend in referrals, and this has prompted health agencies to rewrite their domestic abuse procedures in order to align them.
96. Communication between Cafcass, legal services, and children's social care services is improving, with regular management meetings recently initiated, building on established good relationships and dialogue between social workers and guardians.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

97. The overall effectiveness of the council and its partners in promoting the welfare of looked after children and young people in Oldham is good.
98. Political commitment is strong and supported by effective services which ensure the needs of looked after children are met. Leadership and management are outstanding. Ambition for looked after children and young people in Oldham is outstanding and is reflected in the priorities for the council and its partners in the children and young people's plan. Management information is good with an excellent system used to continually improve performance although quality assurance is less well developed.
99. The looked after children strategy together with the commissioning strategy sets out a clear vision for looked after children in Oldham. The strategy which was developed with key partners indicates that Oldham understands the demographics of the looked after population and the key challenges it faces in improving overall outcomes for children. The work of the corporate parenting panel encourages cross directive support for looked after children and helps to overcome barriers which prevents them from succeeding and doing well, for example the excellent work offering traineeships within the council.
100. The lead member is passionate about the needs of children and young people and highly visible to the workforce and managers. Elected members understand well the needs of looked after children and their role in promoting their educational achievements and what contribution they can make to ensure that they grow into responsible citizens.
101. Most children and young people live in stable placements which deliver positive outcomes for their well-being. An excellent range of mechanisms provide them with opportunities to give their views on a range of matters including their own individual placements and wider council interests. Placements for looked after children are broadly in line with comparators, the percentage of looked after children who had three or more placements in the past year continues to be good and long term placement stability continues to improve. A relatively high percentage of Oldham looked after children are placed within 20 miles of their home. However, the timeliness of finding adoptive placements is poor and despite much work by the local authority it has been like this for some years and this is a significant weakness.
102. The quality of assessments and chronologies are at least adequate and most recent ones are good and outstanding. The chronologies effectively tell the story of the child's journey through the care system. Most care

plans are detailed and strive to ensure permanent plans are in place and maintained. There was evidence within the files seen by inspectors of the children's voice influencing appropriately the direction of the care plan and a very strong recognition of needs arising from faith or culture of the child. Excellent attention is also taken to match children with complex heritages with people that are able to promote and understand their backgrounds.

103. Most young people have their reviews held within statutory timescales and minutes are produced promptly. Changes as a result of learning from a complaint have encouraged greater and more effective participation due to young people being able to specify the time and place of their review.
104. There is an effective complaints procedure in place which is known and understood by children and young people. The number of young people using the service has increased and there is clear evidence of where learning from complaints has brought about a change in practice. The advocacy service, commissioned from the Children's Society, provides an effective service to looked after children and young people placed within and out of the authority. Young inspectors have been trained to inspect residential children's homes in order to contribute to improving services and this has resulted in a number of practical improvements being implemented to the short breaks service for disabled children and young people.
105. Looked after children in Oldham have access to a wide range of excellent services which support them and encourage them to succeed. Outcomes for looked after children as result of the combined work of the local authority and its partners are judged to be outstanding for health, staying safe and making a positive contribution; good for promoting economic well-being and adequate for enjoying and achieve. Work to support looked after children and young people through their personal education plans are variable with too many examples of these being inadequate.
106. There is good support to children on the edge of care. For instance, the family group conference service works effectively with families at risk and is highly valued by families and professionals. However there is no effective monitoring on how many children and young people have been diverted from care, making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the service in relation to the overall looked after children strategy.
107. The service provided to care leavers is good and includes a range of agencies who are co-located in the Positive Steps Oldham centre, including housing and Connexions. This commitment from a wide range of agencies from the voluntary sector and other directorates, for example housing, aims to provide a seamless service to care leavers. Young care leavers value the service they receive and can articulate the difference this level of support has made to their lives.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 1 (outstanding)

108. The capacity to improve is outstanding.
109. Services for looked after children are effectively managed. Financial management is robust. The children and young people's plan is excellent and articulates well the vision, ambition and priorities to deliver sustained improvements across children's services including for the looked after children population.
110. The local authority and its partners have an outstanding track record of achievement. Since 2009, and the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services, the authority have put in significant efforts to improve its performance. The results of this are now demonstrated in the 'performs excellently' judgements in the children's services assessments of 2010 and 2011. All children's performance indicators have additional ambitious local targets and most are showing continued improvements including those related to the stability of long-term placements and those children having three or more moves. The local authority regulated services have steadily improved over the last few years with most judged either good or outstanding. The Fostering service was judged outstanding in 2008 and maintained this judgement in September 2010 and this is excellent. The adoption service was judged good overall and good for safeguarding in May 2010.
111. Multi-agency workforce development is very good, up-skilling children's workers across the sector. Children and young people's involvement on a strategic and operational level is also excellent. Most outcomes for looked after children are now outstanding. The looked after children strategy 2011-2014 is excellent and sets out clearly the priorities for the service, the key challenges faced and how improvements will be delivered. The commissioning of placements is effective. All looked after children and young people are placed in settings which are judged as at least adequate and most are good. Children and young people interviewed as part of this inspection report positively about the support they are receiving from social workers and how they feel involved in the decision making made about their lives.
112. The Corporate Parenting Panel meets regularly to deliver the priorities identified at the annual corporate parenting conference. Attendees at the conference include elected members, senior officers from across the whole council and young people. For example, priorities were identified and work then undertaken to develop greater awareness of sexual exploitation, improved employment offers for care leavers and access to greater youth work opportunities.

113. Elected members have an excellent understanding of the needs of looked after children and their role in promoting their educational achievements. Members attend the Corporate Parenting Panel, undertake inspection and monitoring visits to the children's homes and are members of the fostering and adoption panel. They receive information on the educational achievement of looked after children and challenge officers where they believe that progress may not be as good as it should be.

Areas for improvement

114. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and young people in Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Within three months:

- improve the timeliness of adoption placements
- improve the quality of personal education plans and the educational attainment and progress of the young people concerned.

How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?

Being healthy

Grade 1 (outstanding)

115. The arrangements to ensure good health outcomes for looked after children and young people are outstanding.
116. The health outcomes for looked after children are outstanding and better than those of the general population in Oldham. The performance on the health indicators for looked after children are also above those of England and comparator authorities. The latest national data, December 2011, shows completion of health assessments to be 93%, dental checks 90% and immunisation and vaccine rates 93.2%. All initial health assessments are undertaken by a medical practitioner. There is good use made of a range of locations for health assessments which has contributed to this high compliance rate. The immunisation compliance rates are high due to the range of flexible approaches including immunisation clinics in care homes and foster carer homes.
117. There is good access for looked after children to sexual health services through the universal provision, and personal social health and economic education (PHSE) in schools. Furthermore, for those looked after children in children's homes, the outreach 'clinic in a box' sexual health services are highly accessible and well used. The Brook services provide targeted provision for those young people who are in the pupil referral unit and are deemed as high risk or most vulnerable, including looked after children.
118. There is very good communication with the looked after children social care teams with weekly updates regarding the changes in the looked after children population, including those out of the area. Health staff are colocated with social workers in the field work teams. The specialist nurses and the looked after children administrator have direct access to the social care database, which ensure that all changes in circumstances are addressed. Consent is gained before a looked after children health assessment or review is undertaken.
119. Health assessments seen during the inspection were of an excellent quality, with very good use made of the strength and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) and analysis of the scores. Action plans are not always thoroughly written in a specific and measurable fashion. Care leavers are not always given a full copy of the health history. Systems are in place to ensure that this does not have an impact on the young person's ability to access appropriate health services when needed. The looked after children team are currently developing a document to address this issue. There is good access to health services for care leavers, which are commissioned until the young person is 21 years of age. There had

been some delay with out of area health assessments being undertaken, but since the recent introduction of a payment protocol this has improved and is now good.

120. There is excellent access to the CAMHS dedicated looked after children team, with most referrals seen for consultations, and some starting interventions, within a couple of weeks. The average specialist CAMHS waiting time is 12 weeks, with high risk cases seen within seven days. The speech and language services provide a dedicated service for looked after children, and this results in timely comprehensive assessments.
121. There is a good range of valued health training, including attachment training, for foster carers, residential care home staff and social workers as part of the dedicated 'healthy care training' programme. The designated doctor for looked after children provides individual health condition training based on potential adopters/adoptees needs. This approach has helped to ensure suitable matches and that adoptive parents are fully aware of the life long commitment that they are making. The designated doctor for looked after children is also the medical advisor to the adoption panel. Through focused and dedicated work the target to ensure that all initial adoption health assessments are completed within 28 days is being met and this is good. The annual report for looked after children complies with statutory guidance and is subject to good levels of scrutiny with action plans and outcomes effectively monitored.

Staying safe

Grade 1 (outstanding)

122. The arrangements to safeguard looked after children and young people are outstanding.
123. There are good systems to ensure that only those children who need to be in care are in care. All agencies work exceptionally well together to deliver quality services for children on the edge of care. Information, support and guidance is appropriately targeted to those in most need.
124. Feedback to inspectors from looked after children and those receiving leaving care services show that almost all feel safe within their placements and immediate environment. A very small number had expressed some concerns about their safety recently, and these concerns had been dealt with effectively by the council. All looked after children and young people have an allocated qualified social worker. Feedback from looked after children and care leavers, received from surveys carried out as part of the inspection, show that almost all feel safe within their placements and immediate environment, with a very small number who had expressed some concerns being sensitively supported in a timely manner. All children and young people reported that they had someone with whom they could discuss any concerns. Almost all see their social worker regularly and do so alone.

125. There are effective systems to manage risk and ensure that children are well protected in placements. This includes the excellent work of the corporate parenting manager and participation officer seeing a significant number of looked after children and care leavers on a weekly basis; this ensures that a range of opportunities are available so that children and young people can express any worries or concerns. Looked after children can use the secure Borough Looked After Children's Environment (BLACE) website where they can access additional information and leave messages for the participation officer if they have concerns. A number of agencies are engaged to support care leavers, including the De-Paul organisation commissioned by the council's housing department, working effectively with young people over the age of 15 and with their families to try to prevent homelessness and family disruption. All care leavers remain in contact with the leaving care team. They value the support they receive and report that they can always contact staff.
126. The authority is an active member of Placements North West and uses the regional contracting arrangements to find suitable places for children to live. There are effective arrangements in place including feedback from IROs, social workers, children and parents to monitor the effectiveness of placements. Procurement officers also visit placements on a quarterly basis. Officers have recently amended their systems to ensure that, at the time of issuing contracts, the Ofsted judgement on a setting is rechecked to ensure that it has not become inadequate.
127. Partnership working is a key strength of the council. This has been achieved, in part, as a result of a stable work force and excellent relationships with other agencies. Partners are represented on the Corporate Parenting Panel, and the fostering and adoption panels and therefore are aware of the challenges facing the service. As a result of the outstanding work with the Police and related agencies, very few children go missing from care and no child who has been fostered has been reported missing for some time. There are very good processes to provide support and respond to that small number of children who go missing, including good links into the messenger service for those at risk of sexual exploitation.
128. The large majority of Oldham's looked after children receive high quality of care, where their outcomes are promoted well and they are suitably protected. There is a good and sufficient choice of placements to meet local need. All children are placed in provision which is at least adequate and most are in good or outstanding provision. All the authority's in-house provision is good or outstanding.
129. Foster carers receive good support to help them meet children's welfare needs. Safe caring policies are developed and reviewed regularly during

the lifetime of the placements and are child specific. There is a strong emphasis on good matching and there a few placement breakdowns.

130. The process for the approval of prospective adopters is thorough and aims to only approve adopters who are suitable. Training which is now delivered in conjunction with neighbouring authorities is well organised and well received by prospective adopters. The adoption and permanency panel is rigorous and exercises quality control to ensure that appropriate decisions are made regarding adoption being in children's best interests matching with suitable adopters.
131. Placement stability is good with a high proportion of children living in the borough or within 20 miles of it. Decisions about placement moves are properly made as part of the process of individual care planning.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3 (adequate)

132. The impact of services on enabling children and young people in care to enjoy and achieve is adequate.
133. Of the Oldham looked after children placed in care in England, none of them attends an unsatisfactory school. Almost 75% are in schools that are good or better and around 20% are in outstanding schools. The local authority does not hold information on the quality of the schools attended by the very small number of children in care placed in Wales and Scotland. The authority works hard to ensure the minimum disruption to children's education, even when there are several changes to their home placements. At the same time, it responds sensitively to requests from young people for a change of school when, for example, the reasons for their being placed in care are known by their peers.
134. Education performance is variable. The educational results for looked after children at Key Stage 2 have improved over the last four years. In 2008, they were below the averages nationally and for similar areas. In 2011, they were above the national averages in both English and mathematics. Compared with similar areas, results in mathematics were in line with the average but in English they were slightly below average. At GCSE, the proportion of young people in care who achieve A* - C in five subjects, including English and mathematics, is very low and below the averages for similar areas and across the country. Over the last two years, the gap between the performance of looked after children in the authority and all children locally and nationally has decreased at Key Stage 2 which is good. However, at GCSE, it has widened.
135. The school attendance of children in care, both within and outside the authority, is carefully monitored and has improved. According to the most recent figures it is better than in similar areas and across the country. Attendance is considerably better at primary than at secondary level. The proportion of looked after children permanently excluded from school has

been low for the last three years. Over the same period, however, there has been an increase in fixed term exclusions. The Behaviour and Attendance Partnership is held in high regard by schools and has established rigorous systems for monitoring the attendance of looked after children in schools outside as well as within the authority. The agreed protocols for managing moves of pupils between schools help to keep them engaged with education, even when they are experiencing turbulence in their personal lives. Appropriate educational support is given to children permanently excluded from school. However, there can be a delay in placing these children in alternative schools outside the borough.

136. The authority is in the process of establishing a central database for tracking the educational performance of looked after children. Currently, this only covers children in Years 6 and 11. Information seen by inspectors shows that the targets set by schools for looked after children are not always sufficiently demanding. The very large majority of looked after children have a personal education plan (PEP) that is reviewed regularly. Most of the PEPs seen by inspectors were no better than adequate and some inadequate. They provide a clear, common and appropriate format and a fair degree of detail on the behavioural and emotional development of the young person, however they did not always include the direct or reported views of the child and often lacked data on educational attainment and progress; a particularly important omission where the child was moving school. The comments on the files did not always give a realistic assessment of progress and would not assist in improving the educational performance of the children. For example, one child was described as 'doing well' when his progress had actually slowed. In another case, reference to 'significant improvement' was not borne out by the performance data. In contrast, statements of educational need for young people in care are well constructed and reviewed regularly.
137. Looked after children and young people have access to a good and wide range of leisure activities to enrich their experiences and provide enjoyment. These include sport, music, art and drama activities, as well as the children's university initiative. The range of activities is determined in very close collaboration with the Youth Forum and the Children in Care Council who also provide regular feedback on the quality of what is provided. As a result of such consultation, a group of young people, including children in care, are involved in an extended arts programme where they are exploring the theme of human rights violation. This has included visits to the Auschwitz concentration camp and a collaborative project with young people from Poland. The authority and its partners make strenuous efforts to encourage young people to take part in enrichment activities. For example, young people who might be reluctant to visit a sports centre are provided with support until they develop the confidence to attend on their own. Through the 'Be Loud in Libraries' campaign, which include hosting the 'Battle of the Bands' competition, young people are encouraged to see the library service in a new light. A

central website provides information on what is available locally. Any activities advertised are carefully vetted for quality and suitability. Further quality assurance is provided through schemes such as the Arts Quality Mark for Sports Development. Additional financial support is provided to enable looked after children to participate in activities. Although looked after children are encouraged to take part in activities, the extent of their participation is not consistently monitored by providers.

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement **Grade 1 (outstanding)**

138. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are outstanding.
139. The Children in Care Council is excellent. It is well established and plays a central role in consultation on the planning and evaluation of services. It meets regularly with the Director of Children's Services and elected members and five of its members sit on the Youth Council. It also has close links with the regional children in care council network and the Barrier Breakers group for young people with disabilities and additional needs. An important aspect of provision is the BLACE website which is very good and through which young people are consulted on specific topics that are posted each week and to which they can respond in confidence. The After Care Forum is also highly effective in gathering the views of young people who might not wish, or be able, to attend consultative meetings.
140. Through the participation and engagement strategy, the authority has established a wide range of fora and consultative mechanisms to enable children and young people to express their opinions and to speak out on issues that matter to them personally and which have a wider significance. The Local Democracy Week and the regular Youth Voice events enable children and young people in care to contribute their views and the results have been used by the Children's Trust Board to determine its priorities. Through the 'you said, we did' process, senior officers and elected members give a regular account of the actions they have taken in response to the ideas and suggestions of young people.
141. Looked after children have produced a simple and readable 14 point pledge in consultation with officers and elected members. This is widely publicised and provides a benchmark for all staff and a ready reference for looked after children who believe that their care is not up to the standard that they could reasonably expect.
142. The Children in Care Council has also produced a very useful DVD for all children coming into care to help give them an idea of what to expect. Similarly, members of Barrier Breakers have produced materials to be used as part of the training programme to combat bullying and negative

stereotyping of people with disabilities. Young people are routinely involved in interviewing candidates for senior posts and others across children's services and their views are clearly valued.

143. Feedback received from young people is analysed in detail by the authority and has contributed to changes in provision. For example, as a result of an inspection by members of the Children in Care Council, fire safety arrangements in one short break provision have been adapted to meet the needs of young people with hearing impairment.
144. The local authority's complaints and representations officer works very closely with other professionals to ensure looked after children have independent advocacy support and that the complaints process is coherent and well coordinated. The young people who spoke to inspectors were very clear about the services that were available to them and how complaints could be registered. The advocacy service, commissioned from the Children's Society, provides effective support for looked after children placed within and outside the authority. The independent visitor scheme is recruiting and volunteers but is not yet able to offer a service to all the young people out of touch with their families.
145. There is strong partnership between the local authority and a range of agencies, including the Greater Manchester Police, to identify and provide timely support for young people at risk of offending. Additional support as part of the early intervention process has resulted in the number of young people across the borough required to sign an acceptable behaviour contract being successfully reduced to zero. The restorative justice programme has also been successful and contributed to incidents of re-offending being reduced to 10%. The authority's figures show that, over the last 21 months, the proportion of looked after children who have been convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand has remained low. All young people in care who commit an offence are discussed at the Case Planning Forum to ensure that they receive prompt attention.
146. Weekly monitoring reports on tensions in specific areas of Oldham enables schools and other agencies to be sensitive and proactive in tackling potential problems. The sharing of information also provides a more accurate indication of the nature of a crime, so that targeted work can be done to combat specific types, such as those that are homophobic or racially motivated. The very strong collaboration between the local authority and the Oldham Interfaith Forum makes an important contribution to this work.

Economic well-being

Grade 2 (good)

147. Arrangements to promote the economic well being of looked after children and care leavers are good. Oldham is an area of significant economic deprivation and the combined efforts by agencies has resulted in improvements in access to the job market for this vulnerable group of

young people. The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training increased from 2008/09 to 2009/10 and has remained in line with the averages for similar areas for the last two years. This pattern of improvement is in contrast to the decline in performance elsewhere. The figures for young people not in education, employment or training have remained stable for the last four years. They are better than in similar areas but not as good as the figures nationally. The authority has a clear focus on meeting the needs of 14- 19-year-olds, as assessed by schools and the Life Chances Team. Additional support is provided for those in care, particularly if they are struggling or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This support includes additional help with studying, as well as specially designed courses provided in collaboration between schools and colleges. Through 'job clubs' and advice from employability workers, young people are helped to gain an understanding of the range of opportunities open to them. They are also supported in completing applications and preparing for interviews.

148. The local authority offers a small number of apprenticeships each year, two of which are reserved for care leavers. To enable more care leavers to apply for these and other similar posts, the authority has recently established a pre-apprenticeship programme. This provides access to a variety of placements, as well as intensive work to increase young people's literacy and numeracy skills. Within the first six months of operation, the programme has had a 75% retention rate. Further work has also been undertaken to increase the life-chances of care leavers that includes establishing links with larger firms, locally and regionally, in order to increase the range of work placements available to them during and after their time at school. To increase the training and employment options available to them, care leavers are provided with bus passes and partial funding for driving lessons. Two travel trainers provide good support to help young people with disabilities become more independent.
149. Out of a cohort of 30, three care leavers went to university in 2011. This is due to rise to seven in 2012 and this is good Progress. These young people receive high quality support from the authority, including funding for accommodation, assistance with travel and financial support to return to families or their former foster carers during vacations.
150. The care leavers who spoke to inspectors knew about, and were happy with, their pathway plans. The plans seen by inspectors were well presented, had a clear format which identified appropriate actions and responsibilities and reflected a good balance between the educational, social and personal needs of the young people. The young people had been closely involved in their production, as had an appropriate range of support agencies.
151. The local authority and its partners make very good provision for the accommodation needs of care leavers. The wide range of options available

ensures that all young people have access to affordable and appropriate accommodation. Their requirements are given very high priority. Bed and breakfast arrangements are used very rarely and only in an emergency. All the young care leavers interviewed were very happy with the support that they received, particularly from their personal advisers. The unaccompanied asylum seekers who met with inspectors were also very satisfied with the support that they received including culturally appropriate support and placements.

Quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

152. The quality of provision for looked after children is good.
153. All looked after children have an allocated social worker and the affect of a more stable work force has meant that most young people have been able to retain their own social worker for a sustained period of time. Family support workers are also allocated to young people to undertake a range of tasks including supervising contact, preparing life story work, supporting rehabilitation to the family home and preparation for adoption. This results in children and young people being able to develop trusting relationships with professionals they can rely on at key times in their care journey.
154. There are good systems to determine whether a child should be looked after. The numbers of children entering the care system has remained fairly static over the last few years. Decision making is understood across the service and good use is made of the Provider Panel and Complex Case Panel for children with disabilities or complex health care needs, to ensure that all alternative venues have been explored. A range of agencies are commissioned to work with children, young people and their families who are at risk of entering the care system, including the family group conferences, messenger and Action for Children. However, greater use of performance information could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these services.
155. Placement stability is good and few placements are disrupted. Where placements are at risk, staff have access to a range of services including quick access to CAMHS to try and stabilise the placements. Work is carried out following a placement breakdown, including commissioning staff, to try to understand what the learning is from the case. The service manager for fostering and adoption has studied in depth the cases of adoption breakdown to try to identify patterns and trends to support future work.
156. Permanency planning is a strong driver in care planning, and examples were seen by inspectors of good scrutiny and challenge from IROs, placement panels, the adoption and permanency panel and fostering panel. Both short and long term placement stability is good. Placements for looked after children are broadly in line with comparators. The percentage of looked after children who had three or more placements in

the past year continues to be good and long term stability of placements continues to improve. However, the timeliness of adoptions has remained poor over the past three years and this is inadequate. Oldham are aware of the challenges they face in improving the timeliness in adoption work and have made a number of changes to try and improve the timescales, however this has not yet resulted in sufficient improvements in performance.

157. The fostering service, which is judged outstanding, supports carers very well and continues to recruit carers to improve placement choice and avoid children being placed out of the area. A recent specific recruitment drive has been successful in recruiting carers for children with dual heritage.
158. Very effective work is carried out by the senior social worker employed specifically to review and work with children who are subject to care orders placed at home with parents and special guardianship orders. This means that these cases are not subject to drift. Children who are returned home or placed subject to special guardianship order receive a good package of support, including financial help, and social workers remain in touch where this is appropriate.
159. The arrangements for the review of looked after children are good and most reviews take place within statutory timescales. Children confirmed that most reviews are child centred and they understood what was discussed at their meetings. Members of the Children in Care Council worked in collaboration with IROs to develop new consultation documents and the role play of activities helped professionals understand the experiences of looked after children in review meetings.
160. Case recording is generally up to date and the quality of assessments and chronologies on case files seen are at least adequate and the most recent are good and some are outstanding. The chronologies effectively tell the story of the child's journey through the care system. There was evidence within the files seen by inspectors of the child's voice influencing appropriately the direction of the care plan. There is also good recognition of needs arising from the culture or faith of the child.
161. Care leavers speak highly of and value the quality of support offered to them from the council and its partners, including the prompt response they receive from the leaving care worker and from the dedicated Connexion workers. In particular they value the range of services available in the Positive Steps Oldham services and the non stigmatising affect of having all these services co-located in one building.
162. Children with disabilities have access to a range of professionals who are co-located with health and therefore have access to a range services and professionals. A very small number are looked after and placed in

provision which meets their complex needs. A much larger group is able to access a range of services including short breaks and activity based provision to support families in caring for their children.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 1 (outstanding)

163. Ambition and prioritisation are outstanding.
164. The Children's Trust is an excellent and robust multi-agency partnership working to provide support to all children in Oldham and ensure that those who are most vulnerable, including looked after children, receive significant additional support. The work plan is underpinned by the excellent children and young people's plan which is reviewed on an annual basis to identify areas that need further resourcing. These local authority and partnership plans have resulted in significant improvements in these services.
165. The local authority was judged to be performing excellently in the Ofsted Children's Services Assessment in 2010 and 2011. The fostering service has been judged as outstanding in the last two inspections, the adoption service has been judged to be good and the children's homes judged to be good or outstanding. In the main, performance indicators have been improving and these reflect the high quality outcomes experienced by looked after children. For instance, as a result of the combined work across agencies, health outcomes are better for looked after children than for the general population of children and young people in Oldham. Benchmarking is used by the service to identify other high performing authorities and to identify the highest standards across the Greater Manchester area.
166. The looked after children strategy together with the commissioning strategy sets out a clear vision for looked after children in Oldham and this is monitored through a robust action plan. The strategy shared with key partners indicates that Oldham understands well the demographics of the looked after children population and the key challenges it faces in improving overall outcomes for children. The Corporate Parenting Panel meets regularly to work through the priorities identified at a corporate parenting annual conference. Attendees at the conference include elected members, senior officers from across the whole council and young people. An example given to inspectors of the impact of the work of the panel was the improved number of pre-apprenticeships for looked after children and care leavers.
167. The Pledge was developed by children and young people with officers and members. It holds the council and its partners responsible for delivering high quality services. The Children in Care Council is excellent. It is well established and plays a central role in consultation on the planning and evaluation of services. It meets regularly with the Director of Children's Services and five of its members sit on the Youth Council.

168. Joint commissioning arrangements are excellent, for instance in improving the placements available for looked after children with complex needs. Workforce management is outstanding. Training is well resourced and highly appreciated by staff. Morale is reported by staff to be high and staff turnover and sickness absence is low.

Leadership and management **Grade 1 (outstanding)**

169. Leadership and management are outstanding.
170. There is impressive leadership from the Director of Children's Services in the council and across the partnership organisations. The children and young people's plan is excellent, focusing exceptionally well around improving outcomes for all children and young people in Oldham including looked after children. .
171. There is a clear picture, a 'golden thread', across the workforce of how services for children are structured and how individual's roles contribute to the delivery of the wider vision. There is a good understanding of the journey taken, where the services have been, what improvements have taken place and to the current performance. Weaknesses and resource deficits are tackled and much outstanding performance is now demonstrated. The outcomes for looked after children are judged as outstanding for health, staying safe and making a positive contribution.
172. Managers and staff reported to inspectors that they are supported by visible senior managers who are always available and know their cases. All social workers have regular supervision and annual appraisals which are, in the main, suitably challenging and demonstrate good management oversight. Work to develop the children's sector workforce through a range of training, e-learning and mentorship is excellent. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker and most receive additional assistance through family support workers and this is good. There is excellent promotion of equalities and diversity issues. For instance members of the Barrier Breakers group contributed to inspection of Netherhey Streets (short breaks) provision.
173. Partnership arrangements have also resulted in the expansion of earlier support for those most vulnerable families including those children on the edge of care. Oldham has significantly less looked after children than similar authorities and this is achieved through a good preventative strategy, robust decision making and resourcing of alternative to care services. There are many instances of joint commissioning by the partner agencies including much of the excellent edge of care services, delivered through contracts with the private and voluntary sector and individual budgets for those looked after children and young people with the most severe disability and complex needs.

174. Across the health organisations there are excellent partnerships and high levels of collaboration between organisations and individual practitioners with the focus remaining on the child's needs. Services for children are seen as a priority in health and the local authority and remain so despite all the organisations undergoing significant changes: funding is being protected. There are high levels of challenge and scrutiny from the Children's Trust and the LSCB including the sub groups, some of which are chaired by health managers, Trust Boards and commissioners. The specialist nurse for looked after children has recently become a member of the Corporate Parenting Board, to improve service design and delivery as well as improving information sharing.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 2 (good)

175. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are good.
176. Self-evaluation of what is working well and what needs to improve is accurate and is reflected within the children and young people's plan and the looked after children strategy. Good performance arrangements are in place and these contribute to overall improvements in the service. The local authority has a central performance management team and this provides the information to enable a good understanding of achievement against targets. Performance targets are known to the workforce and managers receive weekly updates; systems are in place to 'flag' when work is required imminently to meet a performance target. There are regular children's social care management meetings focused on evaluating current performance and addressing where this is below target. This has resulted in improvements in the majority of the performance targets but not all, for instance the timeliness of adoption placements. There is insufficient focus on the quality of work, for example the performance management system has increased the number of PEPs but they remain of variable quality with some being inadequate. Quality assurance is under developed in comparison with performance management systems.
177. Effective use of the annual appraisal system is used to identify the developmental needs of managers and staff, who report feeling valued and proud to work for Oldham. Managers, including managers in the children's homes, have taken part in additional and good quality management training from the Institute of Leadership and Management and as part of the 'Trust Oldham' programme. A series of weekly workshops have been delivered on a range of matters including learning from serious case reviews, assessments, after care and fostering and adoption. Staff and partners attended this training which was clearly valued. Managers and staff receive regular very good formal supervision which is challenging and reflective.

178. Court reports, complex assessments and all statutory review minutes are reviewed by the Head of Service and feedback is provided to relevant staff. Case file audits are undertaken by a range of managers and staff, however audits submitted for the purposes of the inspection lacked critical analysis on the quality of the work.
179. Elected members are provided with a range of performance information about looked after children and they can demand additional information and agree extra funding if required for individual children. Performance management information is also shared across the strategic partnerships enabling the LSCB and the Children's Trust to utilise evidence based contextual information to improve services.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	Good
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Good
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Good
Partnership working	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Outstanding
Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Being healthy	Outstanding
Staying safe	Outstanding
Enjoying and achieving	Adequate
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Outstanding
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Good
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Good
Equality and diversity	Outstanding