

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Herefordshire

Inspection dates 13-24 September

Reporting inspector Paul d'Inverno

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), one inspector from the Care Quality Commission and an Additional Inspector. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with 94 children and young people and 27 parents and carers receiving services, front line 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 serious case reviews undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together To Safeguard Children', 2006.
 - a review of 40 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres undertaken in June 2010.

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. Herefordshire's population of 179,300 includes 40,300 children and young people aged 0–18 years; 19% of these children and young people are aged 0–3 years. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average at each phase of education. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7.9% of pupils in primary schools and 5.5% of pupils in secondary schools (including academies), which is significantly below the national averages of 24.5% and 20.6% respectively. The percentage of pupils whose first language is other than English has increased from 1.2% in 2006 to 3.0% in 2010. Forty-eight different languages were recorded in Herefordshire schools in 2010. Polish is the most commonly identified language other than English and accounts for almost 20% of the cohort of children and young people whose first language is not English. There are three distinct minority ethnic groups in Herefordshire: Eastern European mostly newly arrived and accounting for just over 1% of school age population; 1.5% dual heritage pupils; and a long established Traveller population of 0.5%.
5. The Herefordshire Children's Trust was set up in 2007, following a review of the existing Children and Young People's Partnership Board. The Trust has representation from Herefordshire County Council, NHS Herefordshire, which includes the Primary Care Trust, Hereford Hospitals Trust and General practitioners (GPs), from schools and colleges, Youth Offending Service, Probation Service, children and young people, the Third sector, Jobcentre Plus, businesses and West Mercia Police. The Children's Trust is one of the Policy and Delivery Groups of the Herefordshire Partnership, the local strategic partnership. Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) is independently chaired and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in Herefordshire to scrutinise the delivery of safeguarding services across the Children's Trust.
6. Children's social care services in Herefordshire were restructured on 6 September 2010 and are now delivered through one county-wide referral and assessment team, two children in need teams, a children with disabilities team, a looked after children and young people team which includes aftercare, and a fostering and adoption team. A safeguarding and review unit has been established which includes the local authority designated officer (LADO) function, the independent reviewing officers/child protection conference chairs and the participation team. There are 75 foster carer households and no residential children's homes. Private fostering services are provided by the front line social work teams in partnership with the fostering service. Other family support services are

delivered by the voluntary sector, extended services in schools, locality services and through, 12 children's centres across Herefordshire.

7. At the time of the inspection there were 173 looked after children. They comprise 48 young children (0-4), 92 children of school age (5-16) and 33 young people over 16. There are a further 117 care leavers involved with the after care service. Some 193 children had a child protection plan which reflects a rising trend over the last two years.
8. Herefordshire has 81 primary schools, 13 secondary schools (all of which have specialist status), four special schools (two of which have specialist status), three pupil referral units and two academies. The authority is establishing a Virtual School approach in the new structure for the Children and Young People's Directorate to support looked after children and raise standards of individual achievement and attainment, celebrate their successes and increase the overall rates of progress made by looked after children.
9. Healthcare for children is commissioned by NHS Herefordshire (PCT) within Herefordshire Children's Trust, in collaboration with Herefordshire Public Services Integrated Commissioning Directorate. There is a joint chief executive and management team. Hereford PCT Provider Services provides community services for children and young people. Acute hospital services including A&E and maternity are provided by Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), the targeted mental health in schools services (TAMHS) and adult mental health services are provided by Herefordshire PCT Provider Services.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

10. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Herefordshire is adequate. Most services and systems for children in need including those children in need of protection are improving from a low base. The joint area review in 2005 judged safeguarding to be inadequate. In June 2010 the unannounced inspection of the contact, referral and assessment arrangements identified significant weaknesses in the referral and assessment service resulting in an area for priority action. As a result the interim Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director for safeguarding and vulnerable children supported by the Chief Executive have taken prompt and effective remedial action. The work of the referral and assessment team is now adequate. The Framework for Assessment for Children in Need is now being used more appropriately and cases are now being appropriately prioritised. Good action taken by the council has ensured that new referrals are responded to in a timely and appropriate way and decisions about contacts and referrals are now consistent in ensuring children are safeguarded at the first point of call. All cases have been risk assessed and in the cases seen by inspectors no children were at risk of significant harm. Many of the changes are very new and the referral and assessment service continues to be closely monitored by the senior leadership team.
11. The council has temporarily increased the established staffing level in the referral and assessment team to ensure that the backlog is quickly reduced, although caseloads currently remain too high while this work is being undertaken. However, too many assessments of children in need have not been completed within statutory timescales resulting in delays before children and parents access services. Casework has been completed in a significant number of cases which now await closure and the council has acted effectively by employing an additional member of staff to assist social workers to complete the necessary recording and close the cases. When cases are transferred to the longer term teams the standard of practice is at least adequate with the majority of work in the cases seen by inspectors being of a good standard.
12. The HSCB has not established management information systems to allow it to monitor robustly safeguarding and child protection arrangements across agencies. As a result, the Board has not been in a position to hold these agencies appropriately to account. HSCB has now developed a performance management framework which is being put in place. Nevertheless, the HSCB has learnt and disseminated lessons from serious case reviews effectively. Staff now feel more able to raise issues within their own agencies so that concerns can be discussed and remedial action

taken. Agencies, however, do not always escalate concerns when they relate to a partner agency. The quality of preventative services is good. The CAF process has been implemented well and continues to develop. As a result, improving multi-agency collaboration means that children and their families receive more effective and coordinated services and support at an early stage. Over 90% of primary or secondary schools were judged good or better for safeguarding which is higher than the national average.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

13. The capacity for improvement in safeguarding services is adequate. Services are improving across the partnership. The infrastructure and systems for the HSCB are being put in place to enable the Board to fulfil its range of functions effectively. Good plans are being implemented to improve significantly the electronic recording system which will enable managers to improve performance monitoring. Very recent and appropriate action has been taken to improve operational capacity in, and the performance of, the referral and assessment team. While these improvements are not yet fully embedded, senior managers have made a commitment to ensure that the improvements continue and are sustained. Senior managers responded decisively to the areas for development identified in the unannounced inspection which included changes to the frontline and senior managers responsible for the service. The council also recognised that the poor performance of the referral and assessment service had not been identified earlier due to an over-reliance on performance indicators, self-reporting by managers, poor management direction and the inadequacies of the electronic recording system. Senior managers including the interim Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director and Head of Service now regularly audit cases and have taken good management oversight of the referral and assessment service. There has been an outstanding improvement in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Prior to 2008 11 CAF assessments were completed; in the last 12 months over 600 have been completed. The partnership's evaluation reported that parents considered that these are improving their lives.
14. Locality working is being developed well and improving partnerships at practitioner level are adding to capacity. The Children's Trust is becoming more effective and is increasingly using information well, including the views of users to inform decision making. Partnerships at a strategic level are improving with a clearer multi-agency focus. Some developments are too recent to have yet established a good track record. The council is in the process of appointing a permanent Director of Children's Services and the Interim Director has agreed to support the new Director to ensure an effective transition.
15. The recruitment of social workers, especially experienced social workers is a challenge which the council has managed well. A sound selection

process is in place to ensure that experienced agency staff are appointed and that the overall level of skills and experience is increasing within children's social care by recruiting advanced practitioners. The council recognises that it may need to adjust capacity in the near future once the impact of the new structure is embedded and is monitoring this closely.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- Improve the quality and timeliness of assessments ensuring they explicitly identify risk and protective factors and identify the individual needs of children and young people.
- Ensure that staff receive regular reflective and outcome-focused supervision in line with policy requirements, that supervision on individual cases is recorded on the appropriate supervision template and that this is accessible on the electronic recording system.
- Ensure that all case files have complete chronologies and that case recording is up to date.
- Ensure that minutes from child protection strategy meetings and discussions are shared within prescribed timescales.
- Ensure that sufficient information is given to, and effectively analysed by, the HSCB to include the outcomes of single and multi-agency audits so that it can effectively monitor safeguarding and child protection and hold agencies to account.
- Ensure that there is effective performance monitoring including sufficiently in depth auditing which ensures good and timely social work responsiveness, assessment and care planning.
- Ensure that agencies effectively escalate concerns with partner agencies and that appropriate remedial action is taken.

Within three months:

- Improve the electronic recording system so that it can produce accurate information and performance can be effectively monitored.
- Ensure all CAMHS practitioners are aware and implement 'best interest decision making' for all young people.

- Ensure that HSCB has sufficient operational capacity to perform its role effectively.
- Ensure that partners have confidence in the referral and assessment team and that this leads to appropriate referrals.
- Ensure that there is sufficient management capacity in the referral and assessment team and that managers have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform their role effectively.

Within six months:

- Ensure that where there are concerns that children and young people have been sexually abused, they have access to timely assessments in a suitable environment with appropriately trained and experienced clinicians.
- Ensure that systematic evaluation of services informs commissioning.

Outcomes for children and young people

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

17. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people are safe is adequate. Following the unannounced inspection the council responded robustly with decisive and visible leadership from the Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director. All cases referred to social care from 1 April 2010 were audited and risk assessed to ensure the safety of children. The audit confirmed the findings of the unannounced inspection and highlighted delays in children being assessed and protected, poor historical decision making, delays in children and families receiving services, and a significant backlog of cases awaiting assessment or closure. The council has made significant progress in the short period since the inspection. The council has increased and improved management oversight and added capacity to the referral and assessment team. The response to, and management of, contacts and referrals have improved with almost all work now allocated to qualified social workers, although some lower priority work is still currently managed on a rotating duty basis. The overall quality of completed assessments remains variable but shows recent improvement. When cases transfer to the long term teams the quality of their assessments, care planning and management oversight and practice is at least adequate with evidence of good practice in a majority of cases.
18. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to identify and monitor children missing from home, care and education and all children and young people reported as missing are recorded and actively followed up by the police.

The significant number of independent providers of children's homes in Herefordshire has considerable impact on police resources as some of these children's homes have a high frequency of missing children. The council and its partners are aware of the vulnerability of this group and are liaising with colleagues in the West Mercia region to benefit from their experience of identifying children involved in sexual exploitation.

19. The protocol for missing children includes arrangements for those missing from care and home but does not incorporate children missing from education or health settings. The HSCB has not yet analysed the information gathered to address areas of concern. Using their single agency 'Unseen Child' policy, health visitors have a system for flagging up children whom they have not seen for a while and take appropriate action to refer these to children's social care as necessary. The Elective Home Education Service maintains a database of children receiving education at home and regularly reminds schools of their responsibility for children to remain on roll and to advise the service of children being removed for home education. Children in Gypsy, Romany and Traveller communities are provided with good support. The council's actions have reduced the level of absence from school and all children from these communities receive individual support to ensure they make best use of their education.
20. There has been effective work to raise the awareness of domestic abuse and ensure support to children and families. A recently established multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process is in place. The extent to which information can be appropriately shared, however, is limited in the view of other agencies who report that children's social care does not contribute effectively. Action has been taken to address this. Children's social care has not referred any cases to MARAC and has not analysed the reason for this. The number of cases discussed at MARAC is statistically low but the incidence of repeat referrals is high. This suggests that services to support families experiencing domestic violence are not yet having sufficient impact. MARAC now have baseline data which will assist in monitoring the impact of services in future. Women's Aid provides effective support and refuge for children and mothers. The provision of counselling for children subject to domestic abuse is under review and as yet no other service has been put in place to meet their needs. Notifications of domestic abuse are screened by a specialist domestic abuse police officer and this is having a positive impact in identifying priority cases. This is a pilot post, however, and longer term funding has not been confirmed. A proposal to fund a domestic violence worker from Women's Aid to be part of the multi-agency referral team has also not yet been agreed.
21. Arrangements for private fostering were judged inadequate in January 2009. The council has made some progress since this inspection but

notifications remain low and private fostering arrangements have not been effectively monitored by the HSCB.

22. The CAF is increasingly being used across agencies as a key mechanism to ensure that the needs of children, young people and families are identified at an early stage and in a coordinated manner; as a result their needs are responded to effectively. Multi-agency groups are being established incrementally across the area and are accelerating the effectiveness of agencies' joint work. Where these groups have been established for some time, they provide good oversight and manage referrals to the CAF process. Knowledge and insight across agencies is improved as a result and good communication is established between practitioners. Agencies work well together to ensure that the diverse needs of children and families are met. In the more mature examples they have identified and responded effectively to wider issues in the community such as young people's alcohol use.
23. The involvement of a wide range of organisations, including the voluntary and community sector and the youth service, broadens the safety net for children and young people. Schools provide a high proportion of the staff trained in the use of CAF although there remains scope for greater involvement by some schools. Practitioners report good support and training to participate effectively in common assessment arrangements across the partnership. Increased support for parents is helping to build their capacity to support their children and the use of CAF is proving effective in supporting the attendance, behaviour and attainment of pupils. General practitioner engagement in multi-agency work in Bromyard is outstanding. Good engagement by adult services who are involved in the multi-agency meetings further enhances the effectiveness of CAF arrangements.
24. A comprehensive critical analysis and appraisal of CAF have been undertaken and have provided useful insights. For example, this has identified areas of the county where the take-up of CAF is lower and as a result support for the use of CAF has been focused to increase take-up in these areas. A well-conceived model is in place where common assessment is used to identify and deliver continued support for those children who no longer need social care involvement and work is taking place to ensure that the use of CAF is consistently applied in these instances. The establishment of a CAF worker within the referral and assessment team is beginning to ensure that those children who do not meet the threshold for an assessment by social care are referred to CAF agencies where appropriate.
25. Effective safer recruitment processes are well established. Robust processes ensure that all relevant staff have three-yearly Criminal Record Bureau checks. Safer recruitment processes in social care are good. The order and organisation of personnel files are improving, although

recruitment and selection information is not always easily accessible in individual files and this makes audit processes time consuming. The council's Human Resources staff provide good and proactive support to schools to recruit staff safely.

26. Safeguarding training delivered through the HSCB is good. This training is further strengthened by the designated child protection nurse who also promotes safeguarding within her team through training, on call advice, supervision and monitoring systems. Training is leading to improved awareness about safeguarding among the health community.
27. Training is also delivered on serious case review findings and CAF by the HSCB to the Drug Advisory Service for Herefordshire (DASH). It is complemented by team development days hosted by HSCB to raise awareness of operational safeguarding issues. These have been well received by staff who have revised their practices and systems and have promoted better multi-agency working. Since the increase in partnership working and initiation of CAF, DASH has identified some clients withdrawing from their services. DASH staff are now more confident, they monitor drop-off rates and take timely action to refer safeguarding concerns to children's social care.
28. Young parents are invited to attend the Young Mums To Be (YMTB) service held at a central venue. The programme is accredited and involves input on alcohol, drugs and self-harm. Young people who attend YMTB find the service invaluable in providing them with comprehensive advice and guidance on general health, diet, budgets and breast feeding.
29. Increasing numbers of young people continue in education after they leave secondary school and this helps to safeguard them. The level of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is similar to that in comparable areas and better than the England average. The proportion of NEET whose status is not known is slightly better than the England and statistical neighbour average. Some excellent outcomes for individuals have been achieved through creative approaches such as mentoring and alternative learning programmes. Hard-to-reach young people who are NEET receive excellent support through the 2XL programme.

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

30. The effectiveness of services in ensuring that children and young people feel safe is good. Overwhelmingly children and young people told inspectors that they feel safe at school and in their local community. This supports the findings of the Tellus survey where 86% in the county felt 'very or quite safe' which is higher than the national average. The survey also highlighted that the number of children who have experienced bullying is decreasing. Good information about children and young

people's views of bullying and their safety at school and in the community has been collected and is held by the Children's Trust to inform action. Programmes and initiatives are well established in many schools and across the area to raise awareness of bullying, provide support and build the capacity of children and young people to stay safe. The council has identified that bullying remains an issue and is proactive, alongside schools, the youth service and children and young people themselves, in tackling this. An anti-bullying strategy is in place and provides a useful framework for agencies to consider their responses to bullying. An action plan to implement the strategy is in its early stages of delivery and includes an audit of anti-bullying work in schools to be completed in November this year. Cyber-bullying is a priority for the area. There are some excellent examples of tackling bullying and creating a safer environment for children and young people. Young people through the Youth Council have initiated a campaign to raise awareness of the issue. Children and young people reported to inspectors that they felt good support was in place for them when they needed to resolve bullying in their schools, for example through restorative approaches and peer support programmes.

31. Young carers told inspectors that they feel safe and value the trusted adult whom they can confide in. They knew that these adults had to refer child protection issues but were confident that they would handle these well. There is good engagement of children and young people across the partnership resulting in them being heard and appropriate action being taken.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

32. The quality of provision overall is adequate. Service responsiveness is adequate. Excellent support is provided to parents through family support workers. The family intervention project works well with other services to offer intensive support to families. There is evidence that this is making a difference and in one case outstanding work has led to significantly improved outcomes for the children. Parents from a children's centre told inspectors that the centre acts as a vital gateway for them and their children to access universal and specialist services. It provides them with an invaluable network of peer support and friendship. Parents identified good outcomes for themselves including better understanding of their children's needs and skills in supporting their development.
33. Clear thresholds for service response to different level of need have been recently developed. However it is not clear whether they are yet understood fully by partners. The thresholds have not been fully tested or embedded and the partnership is taking further steps to tackle this. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are good overall with a high level of involvement by most agencies, including probation services. There was some inconsistent attendance by children's social care which

has now been resolved. The arrangements for dealing with allegations against staff have been recently improved with the implementation of a clear process. Overall the LADO operates a sound system but in one case seen by inspectors the LADO had not been appropriately informed or involved. The annual report of the management of allegations has not been reported to HSCB as required and some aspects require further analysis, for example the low number of reported incidents from health and the police.

34. Processes to ensure safeguarding concerns are escalated within agencies are improving, however agencies do not always escalate concerns when they relate to a partner agency. Children's social care staff report that they now have more confidence in escalating concerns within their service. There is good communication throughout health with information escalated to senior levels to ensure children and young people are safe.
35. NHS Herefordshire (NHS) has a responsive complaints system for children, young people and their families. Priority is given to the timely resolution of complaints at an early stage. In contrast, the council's children's services have not ensured sufficient awareness of their complaints process and the early resolution of complaints is not recorded and analysed to identify trends. The low level of recorded complaints is partly attributed by the council to concerns being addressed successfully outside the formal procedure and the accessibility of the senior management team who provide an additional opportunity to resolve issues at an early stage.
36. The current sexual offence examination arrangements for children and young people do not secure sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced clinicians to conduct the examinations. There are currently only two forensic-trained paediatricians able to examine children and young people across the county. NHS recognises that this is insufficient to provide a suitably responsive service and is taking action through the commissioning of new services.
37. The Accident and Emergency reception area in Herefordshire Hospital is inappropriate for children and does not provide a separate area for them. The paediatric ward in the hospital has no separate adolescent unit but has recently created a separate lounge facility for them to use. Similarly, within community hospitals, there are insufficient child friendly facilities.
38. Within NHS there is a lack of understanding and practice of 'best interest decision making' with inappropriate use of data protection and confidentiality for young people aged 16-18 years old. Examples include limited consideration of whether young people aged 16-18 have the ability to make informed decisions. This impacts on young people attending appointments. There is a lack of understanding within CAMHS and adult mental health services about thresholds and an absence of transition

planning for young people who have been receiving CAMHS services outside the county and who return to Herefordshire requiring adult mental health services.

39. The council proactively identifies young carers and provides them with an extensive range of support. Several clubs are run for children from the age of eight. In response to the comments from young people as they approached their late teens, the council has established a support group for young adult carers. The young carers who met the inspectors reported that the service gives them a welcome break from their responsibilities and an opportunity to meet others in similar situations. Some young carers prefer not to share their situation with their schools but those who do told inspectors they found the use of things like time-out cards helpful.
40. Parents of children with disabilities were very positive about their experience of Herefordshire Carers who help them to establish support networks, advocate on their behalf, and provide support and advice. However parents said that they would like more activities for their children. The parents told inspectors that communication was not effective between agencies and pathways for services were also unclear, including information relating to transitions to adult services. Families, children and professionals who work with children with disabilities were not sufficiently involved in the planning, promotion and execution of the "Aiming High" holiday programme. This has led to low attendance and cancellation of activities. This is acknowledged by the Children's Trust who have appointed a programme manager and the funding is now being used effectively to widen the number and range of provider services to engage with parents and carers and enhance communication.
41. The council has a good strategic approach to support schools to develop inclusive provision. This, together with high quality provision through the pupil referral units, is providing an increasingly effective continuum of support for children and young people who are at risk of not succeeding in their education. There is a good focus on early intervention. Permanent exclusions are below the England average and fixed period exclusions are also reducing well. A strong downward trend of the use of fixed period exclusions is evident across all types of school. Persistent absence from school is reducing and overall attendance is improving. A range of activities effectively supports these improvements. These include managed moves and transfers, greater use of bespoke learning packages, support for behaviour and the use of the CAF.
42. Assessment and direct work with children and families are adequate. Assessments overall have significantly improved since the unannounced inspection. The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need is now being used more appropriately with children now being seen as part of the assessment. This has been a priority for the council and in the casefiles examined by inspectors, children had been seen. In the one exception

which inspectors drew to the council's attention, the council took prompt and appropriate action. Analysis within assessments increasingly and appropriately focuses on risk and protective factors although this is not always made explicit in recordings. Some assessments are too descriptive, insufficiently analytical, lack sufficient contribution from partner agencies and do not always take historical information into account. There is not enough focus on individual need when assessing sibling groups. The council recognises that improvements are required in children in need plans and is taking action to achieve this.

43. Overall the quality of section 47 enquiry responses is adequate and action is taken to ensure children are not at immediate or significant risk. In some cases agencies, for example CAMHS and Adult Mental Health services, take too long to respond to requests for information. Information sharing has been recognised as a priority for the HSCB and the Board is taking action to address this. In a number of cases seen during the inspection, social workers had not recognised the need to request information from Adult or Mental Health Services as part of their assessment and as a result assessments were signed off without this information. Feedback to referrers is not routinely given within appropriate timescales and is not recorded or monitored. However internal audits by the council identified improvements, for example in seeking and recording children's and parents' views and this was confirmed through the inspection.
44. Although the work of the referral and assessment team is now adequate and referrals are responded to in a timely way, the current backlog of assessment work at the time of the inspection places challenging demands on the team. These cases had been risk assessed and children were not at immediate or significant risk of harm but some families consequently were experiencing delays accessing services. The council is aware of this and is taking steps to improve capacity by increasing temporarily the team complement and focusing management oversight and support to staff to improve skills, competence and practice where necessary. An effective head of service has responsibility for the referral and assessment team and is well supported by senior managers which has meant that significant progress is being made to clear the backlog and there is a good plan to complete this work by the end of October this year. As a result of their previous experiences, partners are critical about the performance of the referral and assessment team and the improvements have yet to impact on this view. There is little evidence that parents or carers receive copies of assessments or information on making complaints and their consent to share information is not recorded.
45. Overall the work of the Emergency Duty Team is adequate but not always sufficiently responsive. Managers within the service described it as providing limited support and this was confirmed by some partners.

46. Case planning, reviewing and recording are adequate overall. The number of strategy meetings has reduced and these are now being used more appropriately. There are delays in sharing decisions and minutes from child protection strategy meetings and the council is taking effective action to address this issue. All children and young people with child protection plans are allocated to qualified and experienced social workers. In most cases seen by inspectors the quality of longer term child protection work is good. Child protection conferences are well chaired by experienced Child Protection Co-ordinators who are increasingly providing effective challenge. There is good multi-agency involvement in child protection planning, with well-attended child protection conferences especially by the police and health services. The social worker from the longer term team attends the Initial Child Protection Conference, which enables a smoother transition for the family and better information sharing. Decisions and recommendations are promptly circulated enabling core groups to develop these to meet identified need and reduce risk. Not all conference minutes contain clear and helpful summaries of the key issues, protective factors, needs and risks. Reviews are held within expected timescales. Children and young people subject to child protection plans were seen regularly and alone where appropriate. Some parents spoke positively about the support they receive. One parent who met inspectors said "she does her job which is to protect my kids". Core groups are held regularly and are well attended by agencies who effectively monitor and implement the child protection plans. Child protection plans are generally good although some are not sufficiently specific and measurable.
47. Records in some case files show an understanding and consideration of the impact of ethnicity, religion and culture in assessments and work with families but this practice is inconsistent. Inspectors saw many examples of retrospective case and supervision recording, cases lacking chronologies, strategy meetings not being written up promptly, child protection minutes not being produced for several weeks, and records being kept in different places on the electronic recording system making. The council has recognised the weaknesses in the electronic recording system which does not effectively support social workers and other staff or provide useful management information and is taking good action to tackle this.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

48. The leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are adequate overall. The Director of Children's Services and the senior leadership team are highly visible and have delivered swift, effective and responsive leadership and management action to improve services in a number of areas, for example in their robust response to the issues raised by the unannounced inspection and in the development of good preventative services. The partnership has a clear vision to ensure

that services are accessible to children and their families at an early stage and have delivered this by implementing their No Wrong Door approach.

49. Ambition and prioritisation are adequate and there are clear and realistic priorities which are supported by annual delivery plans developed by each of the Children's Trust outcome groups. The Children's Trust has clear governance and accountability arrangements and has developed scorecards for each of the outcome areas to monitor priorities. The interim Director of Children's Services has only been in post for a short period but is very experienced and highly regarded and offers effective leadership within the Trust. The Trust is committed to involving young people and does so very effectively through the Shadow Board. There is strong and effective leadership in the majority of areas of service delivery, for example in preventative and early intervention services. This has led to improvements in services in a number of areas from a low base. The Trust has been effective in gaining significant commitment from senior managers across the partnership which has increased its effectiveness. It is developing a clearer vision with a more overt focus on safeguarding and vulnerable groups and its commitment is evidenced in the ring-fencing of the budget for these services. The restructuring of the council's children's services has been well led by the senior leadership team.
50. Performance management, quality assurance and workforce development are inadequate. The Children's Trust is developing a more evaluative approach to performance management. There is evidence of increasingly good information going to the Board which enables more effective monitoring and management of performance clearly linked to priorities. There is an increasing focus on qualitative information rather than an over-reliance on quantitative information and evidence of effective challenge within the Children's Trust. The HSCB has very clear and appropriate priorities which demonstrate their increasing awareness of areas that need improvement and enable it to focus its work effectively. The HSCB has improved from a low base and the infrastructure and systems are still being developed so that it can effectively deliver its business. Performance monitoring by the HSCB is currently inadequate and it does not receive or effectively analyse sufficient information to offer an accurate oversight of agencies' safeguarding practice. It has recently developed a performance framework and undertaken some case auditing but several aspects of the framework have yet to be developed.
51. Monitoring by the council of the implementation of action taken following audits is variable and has not consistently resulted in significant improvement. Some case audits undertaken on individual cases within the referral and assessment team have led to improvements in practice. However, not all audits undertaken by children social care are sufficiently in depth. The council has recognised that its electronic recording system was implemented inefficiently in 2008 and does not support the effective delivery of children's social care or provide accurate reports on

performance. Although officers are working hard to overcome these difficulties and plans are being implemented to improve the system, this is currently having a detrimental impact on the ability of social workers and managers to deliver their work to the appropriate standards. This undermines performance monitoring and the robustness of data. Good plans are being implemented to improve the system significantly which will also enable managers to monitor performance effectively.

52. Managers who chair child protection conferences undertake an evaluation of all cases; this is beginning to have some impact on improving performance but this has been implemented too slowly. It is recognised, for example, that too many social workers do not produce conference reports in time for them to be shared with colleagues in other agencies or with families; at the time of the inspection this remained the case.
53. The morale of staff is good and they were positive about the future changes and challenges. Social workers value the support they receive from their managers who are readily accessible for day-to-day discussion and case decisions. Following the unannounced inspection, the council responded swiftly to improve arrangements for social workers' formal supervision but the council's standards for the frequency and recording of supervision are not yet consistently met.
54. The council has a good multi-agency workforce development strategy with very effective links with educational establishments and some good support to staff across the children's workforce. Support for professional development is good; all staff have good access to training and are encouraged to develop their professional skills further by undertaking post-qualification awards. All nine newly qualified social workers receive very good support. The council has good arrangements for developing its own workforce. Inspectors met newly qualified social workers whose professional training had been funded by the council and who reported that the secondment package is good and that they receive excellent support. Some vacancies exist for health visitors and school nurses. The partnership has successfully attracted and trained other members of the children's workforce into this role.
55. The number of NHS provider staff trained in safeguarding to the appropriate levels exceeds the government target of 80%. All pharmacists and dentists who are also directly employed by NHS have received training up to level 2 in safeguarding. Safeguarding is part of the quality outcome framework for GPs of whom 86.5% are trained to level 2.
56. User engagement is good overall with some outstanding features. Service users' views effectively inform strategic developments and individual case planning processes. The voice of children and young people is valued and there are some outstanding examples of their active involvement in influencing the council and the work of the Children's Trust. The Children's

Shadow Board and the Youth Council have done good work in helping to identify the priorities of the partnership and have been supported well in taking these forward. The Shadow Children's Trust Board and Youth Council have taken effective action to combat bullying. The Shadow Board has identified alcohol use as a current priority and has been granted £10,000 by the Children's Trust to undertake further work. Young people involved felt listened to and that they made a difference. The Shadow Board acts as a useful vehicle for consulting a wide range of school councils and feeding key messages from other children and young people into the Trust. Young people are engaged in recruiting staff and there is an active young inspectors group who visit and give their views on the quality of services in the area.

57. Partnership working is adequate overall and well established across agencies at all levels. Partnerships between frontline practitioners are good and the Children's Trust has strong committed partners at a strategic level. There has been a lack of compliance by agencies in producing reports on performance as agreed by the HSCB and the chair has challenged this. The HSCB has undertaken three serious case reviews in the last 18 months; two were evaluated as good and one as adequate. Lessons learned from these reviews have been effectively disseminated to staff in all agencies, have informed the key priorities of the HSCB, and have begun to improve practice. The development of partnerships at locality level and through the locality teams is good and improving. Multi-agency groups are accelerating the effectiveness of joint working.
58. There is an adequate and increasing focus by the council on equality and diversity issues. Equality impact assessments result in clear action plans and include requirements for race awareness training, developing resources and improving the monitoring of ethnicity. The gap in attainment for most groups whose circumstances make them more vulnerable than their peers is narrowing. Multi-agency working is increasingly successful in ensuring that the individual needs of children, young people and their families are met in a more holistic way. However, assessments do not consistently take identity, ethnicity, race and cultural issues into consideration. Analysis of the use of the CAF shows good engagement with minority ethnic groups including the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community. There is a designated health visitor for the travelling community who is also engaged in leading on a number of CAF assessments. The number of pupils with English as an additional language has increased substantially in recent years. Twelve community link volunteers have been recruited to support new families with English as an additional language and to be a link between them and the schools. Racist incident reporting is in place and the levels of reporting have remained steady in recent years. The Rainbow Forum provides good support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people.

59. Value for money is adequate. The council is increasingly focussed on achieving value for money. This was particularly evident with the commissioning of the locality teams. Commissioning is underdeveloped but is improving, a greater emphasis on evaluation and the reviewing of some services, such as children with disabilities, are improving value for money across the partnership. Although some services have been evaluated, evaluation of all services is not systematic. The council has good arrangements in place for the commissioning and funding of services for children with complex needs. Many services previously contracted out are now being reviewed for their effectiveness. There is a strong emphasis on users' voices in commissioning which is contributing to achieving value for money. For example, through the consultation on service provision for eating disorder, children and young people stated they wished to be treated within Herefordshire. This has led to the partnership returning children to services within the county and more being delivered within the community.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

60. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children, young people and care leavers is good with some outstanding features. Leadership is good including that of the interim Director of Children's Services. The management of health services for children is good. Children are visited regularly by their social workers. Partnership working at all levels for looked after children is strong and this is driving continuous improvement in services for looked after children. Corporate parenting arrangements are good with strong commitment from all agencies including the designated GP. The Lead member for children's services demonstrates a strong passion and commitment to meeting the needs of looked after children. Elected members monitor and challenge performance and meet regularly with looked after children.
61. Outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers are good with some outstanding features. The support that children receive in their education is outstanding. The partnership has high expectations for looked after children which is evidenced in the excellent educational performance for looked after children compared with statistical neighbours and the success achieved in narrowing the gap between this group and the overall cohort. There is a good and improving fostering service. The adoption service was judged adequate in its last inspection and there is evidence of subsequent improvement. Children enjoy stable placements and children who met inspectors and those who responded to the survey reported that their care was either good or very good.
62. The quality of direct work is good and there is a strong commitment to undertaking life-story work with children and young people. Core assessments and care plans are not kept sufficiently up to date, leading to less timely decisions and actions in a small number of cases. The quality of care plans and pathway plans is variable and the plans are not always sufficiently embedded in work undertaken with children and young people. There is a good advocacy service. An independent visitor service is not yet in place, although negotiations are currently taking place with a provider to establish one.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (good)

63. Capacity to improve is good. Performance against indicators for looked after children are generally better than in statistical neighbours and the national average. There has been very good improvement in ensuring the stability of placements for looked after children. A virtual headteacher has recently been appointed. This adds further capacity and strengthens the

coordinating and monitoring arrangements to continue the excellent support that children receive in their education. Young people are regularly listened to and staff, senior managers and elected members act on their views. Strong and committed partnership arrangements are in place. Senior managers and elected members are committed to improving outcomes for looked after children and are effective in driving the changes needed.

Areas for improvement

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

Within three months:

- Ensure that care and pathway plans are of good quality and regularly updated and that they are used to deliver effective services to children and young people.
- Ensure that children and young people know how to make a complaint, and that early resolution of complaints is recorded, themes are identified to learn lessons, and appropriate action is taken.
- Ensure good management oversight and qualitative assurance arrangements are in place which lead to improvements.

Within six months:

- Ensure that an independent visitor service is established.

Outcomes for children and young people

65. Services to promote good health among looked after children and care leavers are good. Overall health assessments are completed to a good standard and individual action plans are in place. The council's own data show that 91% of looked after children and young people in 2009/10 received annual health checks which is a good achievement and above the national average. There is a good dedicated CAMHS team for looked after children consisting of a consultant psychologist, a CAMHS nurse and a social worker. Professionals and looked after children and young people interviewed during this inspection report that the services they have received from CAMHS are effective, timely and that outcomes are positive. CAMHS provide good advice, guidance and training to foster carers. Children and young people looked after have good access to the dedicated children in care nurse for information, advice and guidance and she provides a well used drop-in service and informs children about sexual health. The children in care nurse is not commissioned to provide a service

to care leavers. Children and young people and foster carers report health provision to be good. Looked after children all have health passports which the young people are helping to develop further. An excellent Care2Cook course on preparing meals from fresh ingredients is delivered. Attendance is good and feedback from those who took part was very positive. Their responses to the question how it could have been better included 'It couldn't' and 'You can use food for more than one meal.'

66. The Safeguarding of looked after children and young people is good. There are some good services for children on the edge of care. The council recognises that, due to the number of teenagers entering the care system, further intensive work is required to prevent them entering the care system unnecessarily. There is emerging evidence that the Family Intervention Project (FIP) is achieving good outcomes for children and their families and preventing children entering the care system. The work in one case seen by inspectors was outstanding where the FIP had worked effectively with other agencies including a children's centre to secure much improved outcomes for the family. The parent stated that the FIP worker had been 'brilliant.' Family group conferences are in place and families access these. However, the council has not yet collated sufficient evidence to judge their effectiveness.
67. Children met by inspectors and who responded to the survey reported that their care was either good or very good. Children and young people are able to access suitable support and guidance. Inspection has judged the fostering service is good and the adoption service is adequate, and there is evidence of subsequent improvements. All adoption placements of looked after children were timely, although only a small number of adoptions were made in 2009/10. The council focuses strongly on securing placements with family and friends and has a higher proportion of these placements than statistical neighbours which is a good outcome for the children. A good range of services supports placement stability. Young people report feeling settled, happy and safe within their placements. The proportion of children who had three or more placement moves in a year is very good at 4.9% in 2009/10, a rate which is much lower than the national average. Longer term stability during the same period is good at 78%, significantly higher than the England average. Children and young people are matched to a care placement that meets their needs. All looked after children are allocated to a suitably qualified social worker. Children spoken to during the inspection report good access to their social worker, although a very small number who responded to the survey stated that they did not see their social worker regularly. Case files reviewed by inspectors showed that looked after children were seen regularly by their social worker.
68. The council currently does not have an independent visiting service and is in the process of negotiating a contract with an external provider to deliver one. The monitoring of out of county placements is good. Looked

after children missing from placements, whether in or out of county, receive a good service from VOICES, a participation service which provides some advocacy and which conducts the independent return to placement interview. Where providers are identified as having high numbers of missing children and young people, a joint visit is made by the LADO and police which is good practice.

69. The impact of agencies to ensure looked after children are successful in enjoying and achieving is outstanding. Children and young people receive very good support to enjoy their education and achieve very well. Their attainment is outstanding against similar areas for looked after children. Children make excellent progress and achieve well between Key Stage 1 and 2. In 2009, all looked after children sat at least one GCSE and 42.9% gained 5 GCSEs grades A* - C. The gap in attainment at Key Stage 4 between looked after children and the general cohort is closing and is narrower than that found nationally. A strong trend of children and young people achieving well has been established over a number of years and this good performance is underpinned by very strong corporate support for them. Looked after children's education has been effectively prioritised by the council and all receive one-to-one tuition in English and mathematics. The Education Liaison Support Service (ELSS) provides very good support to children, carers and schools. Schools have excellent knowledge of their looked after children and track their progress effectively. In individual cases examined by inspectors most children and young people were making good progress in relation to their starting points and individual circumstances.
70. The school attendance of looked after children fluctuates and in 2009 attendance was worse than comparators. As a result positive action has been taken with individuals to improve their attendance and evidence provided by the council shows that attendance is improving. Personal education allowances are used effectively to support children's development and raise their aspirations. No looked after child was permanently excluded in 2009 and the use of fixed term exclusions is reducing. Social workers, family placement officers and carers all describe excellent support from ELSS. Young people's educational attainment is also supported well through access to a good range of leisure, recreation and personal development opportunities such as international visits and summer holiday programmes. Children and young people who spoke to inspectors described good outcomes regarding their education provision, and good access to apprenticeships, training and further education. Centre 18 offers looked after children and young people a range of support and activities.
71. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are good. Looked after children are active in service development and participate routinely in the recruitment of staff. Twenty young people have received 'You Chair' training and this has enabled them

to chair their own care reviews. Children and young people's participation in their reviews is good and effective and reviewing officers are highly sensitive to ensure their individual needs are met. However, reports from social workers about looked after children are not always shared with young people and their family prior to reviews. A good advocacy service, provided by the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, supports young people well. Groups such as VOICES also enable children and young people to share their opinions and help shape service provision as well as contribute to decisions regarding their community and environment. There is effective work by the Youth Offending Service and partners to reduce offending behaviour by looked after children. The partnership's own data show performance which is significantly better than the national average and continuing improvement. A Multi-agency Prevent and Deter Planning Group organises packages of support for young people who are at risk of offending. Performance is very good and improving in preventing young people receiving a final warning reprimand or conviction.

72. The impact of agencies in enabling looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being is good. The aftercare service is effective and prepares young people well for leaving care and living independently. One care leaver described her aftercare worker to inspectors as 'faultless and the best.' Care leavers have played an important role in staff recruitment and their views have contributed well to service development and delivery. Centre 18 provides a weekly drop-in service for care leavers and workshops to enable them to develop independence skills. Pathway plans are completed although the quality is variable and they are not fully embedded in practice or used as a working document. The council places a strong emphasis on the use of apprenticeships and the partnership is demonstrating a strong commitment to corporate parenting in plans to offer an apprenticeship to every care leaver who wants to take this up. All school leavers are in employment, education or training. In 2008, 92.9% entered full time education, employment or training and in 2009, 100% were engaged in full time education. There is good support to enable care leavers to secure employment, education and training places and in 2008/09 87.5% care leavers had taken up places. Performance was lower in 2009/10 at 65%.
73. Care leavers have good access to advice, guidance and support through effective partnership working between Connexions and the council. Care leavers have access to seven dedicated supported housing placements which support their transition into independent living well. Care leavers also receive intensive support from independent agencies in the area which provide accommodation as well as support packages. In 2008/09, all care leavers were in suitable accommodation although this has reduced to 90% in 2009/10. Two young people are currently in bed and breakfast accommodation but are monitored rigorously and have clear plans in place.

The quality of provision

Grade 2 (good)

74. The quality of provision overall is good. Service responsiveness is good. The council provides a range of effective services to avoid young people needing to come into care unnecessarily. Placement stability is good and the council has good monitoring arrangements supported by two panels to monitor the outcomes, financial viability and inspection ratings of commissioned services. In addition to the range of opportunities for young people to express their views, four complaints were received by looked after children and care leavers in 2009/10. These complaints were resolved and resulted in a few changes to service provision. Some young people spoken to knew how to make a complaint and a complaints leaflet is included in the Pack Attack provided to every looked after child. There is limited evidence that young people are appropriately encouraged and enabled to complain and comment on services through the complaints process. The view of the council is that informal systems are used effectively to resolve issues. Young people who have used the complaints procedure were well supported by independent advocates.
75. Assessments and direct work with looked after children are good overall and are child-centred and needs-led. Casework seen by inspectors showed that practice is responsive to the individual needs of children and leads to good outcomes. Children and young people are seen by their social worker on a regular basis. Good evidence of effective multi-agency working was seen by inspectors. The use of life story work is well embedded and promoted within the authority. Staff, children and young people have all spoken very highly about the support offered by STEPS, which provides one to one sessions and has been effective in supporting placements and improving their stability.
76. Case planning, review and recording are adequate. The independent reviewing officers provide increasingly effective challenge to case planning. However, while the majority of reports and plans are of good quality, this is not yet consistent. The reviews in the vast majority of cases sampled during the inspection were timely. Reviews are well attended by partner agencies and planning is effective and appropriate. Good monitoring between reviews ensures that agreed action is taken and cases do not drift. The quality of reviews is good and there is a sound focus on hearing the views of children and young people and on the outcomes for children and young people. Some children chair their own reviews. One young person summarised his experience of a review by saying it "felt like my meeting".
77. Care plans and pathway plans are not always central in the work undertaken with children and young people. The majority of care plans seen are comprehensive and specifically tailored around outcomes for children and young people but the plans are not always updated following changes of circumstances. Pathway planning is not always sufficiently

detailed and does not clearly demonstrate the steps to support young people to achieve their goals. Permanency planning is good and effective in minimising delay. Recording is satisfactory overall although the quality of recording is variable. There are some delays in review decisions, actions and minutes being distributed and this has an impact on actions being followed through in a timely way. Not all cases have chronologies making it difficult for social workers and managers to understand the family history.

78. Supervision of staff is variable in terms of quality and frequency and not used appropriately to challenge and monitor practice and decision making. Supervision records are generally not sufficiently specific and measurable with clear timescales. Limited evidence was found that the new supervision template had been implemented.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (good)

79. The leadership and management of services for looked after children are good. The partnership achieves at least good outcomes for looked after children and sometimes better. Looked after children are a key priority and the interim Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director for safeguarding and vulnerable children provides strong leadership to promote good outcomes for looked after children. The partnership not only has high aspirations for their looked after children but a determination to take action and achieve these. This is well evidenced in the educational progress made by children and young people. The partnership celebrates children and young people's achievements and has an annual celebration event.
80. Performance management and workforce development are adequate. Foster carers receive good training and support but social workers report variable access to training. There is limited evidence of recorded management oversight of cases and of audits being undertaken by managers. Placements with independent providers are monitored well which ensures a good focus on children and young people's individual needs.
81. User engagement is good with some outstanding features. There is a culture of involving children and young people in decisions about their lives and in the planning and delivery of services and there is regular and systematic participation by looked after children. The council has enabled looked after children to contribute to strategic decision-making through the Children in Care Council. An effective participation team enables children and young people to influence services. Regular meetings take place between the Heads of Services for Safeguarding and for Looked after Children. Looked after children have written their pledge and are

working with the Corporate Parenting group to raise its profile. Young people have formed a dance group 'D unit' and a singing group as a vehicle to express their views and be heard. Young people state that they are listened to and are able to make a difference.

82. Young people have been informed and consulted on the restructure of children's services and the development of the new Children and Young People's Plan. Looked after young people were consulted on how to decorate and how to make best use of Centre 18, a resource specifically for looked after young people. Elected members meet regularly with looked after children who are also actively involved in the recruitment of staff. The Children in Care Council meets regularly and is currently helping to develop a DVD to inform children and young people entering the care system.
83. There are also good examples of young people's contribution to service design and delivery in health. For example, consultation with young people resulted in NHS Herefordshire commissioning a CAMHS nurse for looked after children with the service being called SOS (Solve our Stress).
84. Partnership working is good. Corporate parenting and partnership at all levels are strong and effective within Herefordshire including the Children's Trust. Each of the Trust's outcome groups are required to take account of the needs of looked after children. Partnership working on individual cases is good, including effective multi-agency planning. NHS Herefordshire has a strong commitment to looked after children and has good partnership arrangements with the council which lead to good and improving outcomes for children and young people. The Children in Care Interest group includes operational staff across all partners who work with looked after children and is improving integrated working and planning for services.
85. Equality and diversity are adequate. Casework seen by inspectors showed that workers are responsive and sensitive to children's individual needs. Good examples were seen of sensitivity towards looked after children from the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community. Joint working with dedicated Travellers Support Workers is good and social workers use this service for advice and information about cultural issues to inform practice. Inspectors found evidence of good examples of sensitivity to, and consideration of, equality and diversity. In one case seen by inspectors there was good support provided to a disabled family and friends carer. Equality impact and needs assessments have been undertaken and have led to specific training for foster carers and the development of a translation and interpretation network. There has been good work through the English as an additional language team to support asylum seekers in learning English.

86. Value for money is adequate. The council has no residential children's homes and commissions this provision from a group of 10 local providers. The range of independent providers in Herefordshire results in adequate availability of placements. The partnership purchases good quality placements for looked after children on an individual basis. All placements are checked against the West Midlands database and are commissioned using West Midlands Consortium contracts. There is a general principle of commissioning services from providers graded good or above and the individual placement agreement identifies the needs of the child and the outcomes to be achieved including timescales. A multi-agency placement panel is being developed which scrutinises placement progress and ensures that identified needs are met. Professionals have a good knowledge of the quality of placements but there is no systematic process to build up local intelligence about the effectiveness of providers overall in meeting identified needs. A feedback system for professionals about placements is in the early stages of implementation. The Complex Needs Solutions Panel (CNSP) has seconded an officer for a year to review all independent placements to ensure that they meet effectively the needs of children and young people and offer value for money. Decisions by the CNSP are based on how a provider can demonstrate that they are able to meet all the identified needs and outcomes along with scrutiny of cost. There is an increasing focus on the effectiveness of services and some good analysis, for example about the Family Intervention Service and a review of the fostering service but not all services have yet been systematically reviewed.

Record of main findings: Herefordshire

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

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