

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Cambridgeshire County Council

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 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 five Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two inspectors from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with staff from partner agencies, front-line managers, senior officers including the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - discussions with 80 children and young people receiving services and with 37 parents and carers
 - 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, day care and residential provision and the evaluation of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together To Safeguard Children' 2006
 - a review of over 60 case records for children and young people with a range of needs to provide a view of services offered over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision-making undertaken
 - visits to area teams, schools and locality community based provision
 - the outcome of an unannounced inspection of the county's contact and referral centre and local teams providing assessment and planning services.

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

Service information

4. Cambridgeshire has nearly 142,000 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 24% of the total population of the county. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below the national average. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 8% of the total population. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is well below national figures.

5. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership was set up in 2002 and work to review and redevelop as a new Children's Trust with a Trust Board has just been completed. The new Trust will be formally launched in October 2009. Representatives on the Trust will include the five district councils, Jobcentre Plus, the Probation service, Cambridgeshire University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, Cambridgeshire Community Services, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, schools, colleges and early years, elected representatives of the voluntary and community sector, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire NHS and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB is independently chaired and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in Cambridgeshire to deliver safeguarding services.

6. All referrals for social care are processed through the Contact Centre where they are prioritised by a Social Care Team Manager and referred on to three Area Teams which include Intake and Assessment Teams, Long-Term, Looked After Children, Disability and Family Support Teams. In addition there are specialist countywide services such as Fostering and Adoption Service, 16 plus, Safeguarding and Standards Unit; which includes the Family Group Meeting Service, Participation Service, Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authority Designated Officer. There are 193 foster carers, offering 306 placements and seven children's homes, including respite care.

7. The 14 Locality teams provide a local focus for integrated service provision which includes: Youth Workers, Connexions, Education Welfare Officers, Secondary In-School Support, Parent Support Advisers and Children's Centre Managers; 27 Children's Centres have been established (five Phase 1, 22 Phase 2) and a further 13 centres are currently under development for Phase 3. By April 2010 it is planned that there will 40 children's centres across the county.

8. At the time of inspection there were 465 looked after children. They include 95 children under five years of age, 320 children of school age (5–16) and 50 post-16.

9. Commissioning and planning of health services and primary care are carried out by Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust (PCT). Acute hospital services are provided by Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Hinchingsbrooke Health Care NHS Trust and primary care is provided by Cambridgeshire Community Services. Mental health services, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), are provided by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (Adequate)

10. The overall effectiveness of the safeguarding services in Cambridgeshire is adequate. Improvements in coordinated services are taking place, with a notable pace of change over the past year as a result of a number of major developments being implemented. Statutory requirements are met, although sustaining a timely provision of assessments and services continues to be a challenge for council services. Some children in need referrals remain unallocated to a social worker for a brief period, prior to an initial assessment being undertaken, although this work is overseen by managers. Operational management provides a supportive and enabling environment for the workforce but performance management and continuous improvement are not consistently evident throughout safeguarding services. The current strategic and organisational plans have led to improvements in service delivery for increasing numbers of children, notably in the areas of prevention and early intervention. The national performance indicators relating to the timeliness of assessments do not show sufficient improvement, although there are clear improvements in other areas such as lower rates of children repeatedly subject of protection plans and the increase in the proportion of cases allocated to qualified social workers. This is compounded by the relatively weak and locally generated systems for monitoring performance and driving improvement. These are temporary arrangements which the council has developed to overcome short-term difficulties experienced with their computerised information systems.

11. The commitment of partner agencies to the joint safeguarding and child protection agenda is strong. Restructuring of services has provided a solid platform towards a developing coordination of provision, notably in early intervention. Partner agencies provide a generally positive contribution, although working relationships between the locality teams and children's area teams are at different stages of development. Improved commissioning arrangements with community groups are in place, notably to ensure that the voice of children and their parent/carers is heard more effectively. Morale is high within the children's

social care workforce. The number of social workers is sufficient to deliver the priority work of the area, although many are recently appointed with limited experience. The workforce is appropriately supported by a range of professional development opportunities, drawn together effectively in the local strategy which is clearly aligned to the 2020 Workforce Strategy.

Capacity for improvement Grade 3 (Adequate)

12. Capacity for improvement is adequate. Considerable efforts have been made, notably by the senior management team, towards establishing clear vision, structures and detailed operational arrangements for its services. The accelerating pace of change combined with a revitalised ownership by stakeholder agencies, including engagement with the voluntary sector, is supporting the development of further sustained improvement. The Local Safeguarding Children Board internal review in March 2009 appropriately identifies that the board has a sound basis to develop priority areas, and the resulting detailed action plan and restructuring are ambitious and intended to ensure the necessary links across all appropriate planning and delivery mechanisms. There is a robust plan for the continued implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) and the development of the electronic CAF which is at an early stage. Increasing the number and spread of CAFs across the area is a priority for the strategic partnership. The responsiveness of the Cambridgeshire Direct Contact Centre has improved and developments are in place to further improve performance. A number of initiatives to recruit social workers have had a positive impact. The local authority has further developed a range of measures to improve retention rates. Substantial additional resource has had a positive effect in reducing local variations in performance. There is strong commitment to training by the local authority and by the LSCB and its partner agencies, and the training provided is highly valued by staff. Performance management is well understood at the strategic level within social care and appropriate quality assurance arrangements are in place. However at operational level, these are inconsistently applied and are compounded by the limitations of the information systems. A performance culture is developing within the safeguarding partnership but has yet to be fully embedded.

Areas for improvement

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

Within three months:

- Ensure that new referrals are allocated when a decision has been made to undertake an initial assessment.
- Improve the timeliness and quality of assessments, case planning and the consistency of managerial oversight of cases.

- Ensure that record keeping is improved and completed in a timely manner to ensure closure or transfer of case management responsibility to appropriate services.

Within six months:

- Improve the contribution of children and young people and their parents/carers to service development and evaluation.
- Ensure that performance management arrangements are consistently applied and embedded within safeguarding services and are clearly linked to outcomes.
- Ensure that thresholds for early intervention and child in need services are better understood and consistently applied across the area.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board should develop performance management, to ensure that services are in line with strategic objectives and plans and that these are monitored and evaluated.

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)**

14. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people are safe is adequate. An infrastructure of procedures and policies provides the framework for assurance that all agencies work toward the same objectives. The LSCB provides leadership on all aspects of safeguarding but statutory partner ownership is not consistently evident, nor is performance management of safeguarding services being undertaken across partner agencies. Robust arrangements are in place for the identification and pursuit of children missing from education and those likely to be subject to trafficking and exploitation. There is a range of services providing good or very good focus on the safeguarding needs of children. Of particular note are specialist and targeted provision for pupil support. The Education Child Protection service provides an effective focus for services in the area.

15. Safeguarding needs are assessed effectively leading to appropriate actions to ensure that children and young people are suitably protected, with considerable support from key statutory agencies. Information sharing is generally good, however the use of intelligence and the emphasis on the protection of children are not fully effective, for example there is inconsistent attention to the needs of the children of parents receiving a mental health assessment. The wishes and feelings of children are routinely collected and

clearly contribute to the planning for support and some safeguarding services, particularly through children's centres and schools Reviews and core group meetings are almost always timely and are well structured. They are universally valued as drawing together information, assessments, needs and plans. Many plans are ill defined, however, with relatively unspecific objectives and timescales for their achievement.

16. There is good work in several areas toward safeguarding, notably around domestic abuse, young people who offend, and with children experiencing difficulties at school. Other areas, for example under the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), note a sustained increase in demand and complexity and are experiencing some difficulties in ensuring their responsiveness. The focus on earlier sustained assessment and intervention is still developing but shows signs of being effective in support and monitoring of children's general safeguarding needs. Despite the firm and positive commitment by the local authority to support families when no longer subject to a protection plan, the quality of this support is variable.

17. The LCSB has taken effective steps to ensure that partner agencies engage in safe recruitment practices. The council has well-established and strong practices to ensure safe recruitment and staff development in its workforce.

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

18. Appropriate action through a wide range of initiatives is being taken to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Children and young people report that they mostly feel safe. Their views are effectively gained and taken seriously by agencies, particularly by those in the children's social care services. Children have opportunities to express their views about a wide range of issues, including bullying. Consultation is routine and the area is reaching out towards a range of new children's groupings. There is regular assured consultation with children who are believed to be at risk of significant harm and efforts are taken to ensure they make a contribution to their plans and services. Advocacy is available within child protection arrangements and young people are enabled to participate in child protection conferences. However, this is inconsistent and arrangements do not always reflect the age and understanding of the child.

The quality of provision **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

19. The quality of safeguarding service provision is adequate overall. Child protection referrals are dealt with in a timely way. Many of the key indicators within the National Indicator Set (NIS) have shown improvements and are within the same range as Cambridgeshire's statistical neighbours. Thresholds for assessment and intervention are clear at the high levels of need but are inconsistently applied around eligibility for child in need assessments. Some referrals are inappropriately unallocated, particularly those where children have not been subject to an initial assessment and where there are concerns during pregnancy for an unborn child. While there is active and responsive managerial

involvement during the initial assessment processes, this oversight does not always continue throughout interventions, particularly in ensuring a timely focus on impact and outcomes for children. Whilst the timeliness of initial and core assessments is improving, too many are not completed in a timely way. The pace of improvement in core assessments has been slower than is required, with management of performance not consistently focused on the timely completion of assessments. The depth of analysis within written assessments is not consistent. The objectives for work with families are not always sufficiently specific or measurable. These matters are affected by the limited functionality of the currently used computerised information systems.

20. The effectiveness of links between the area social care and locality multi-disciplinary teams is variable but strengthening. The sharing of good practice between locality teams is a positive recent development, although it is too early to assess the impact. Direct work with children and families, particularly that undertaken by the child and family workers in social care, provides a sound approach in building relationships, confidence and resilience in children as well as ascertaining a clear understanding of the impact of parenting on children and the capacity to change. Appropriate partnership working to safeguard children is in place, such as in response to domestic abuse in families and education child protection service. There are strong working relationships between most of the core statutory agencies. Recruitment and retention difficulties in some health visiting and school nursing services do not enable sustained partnership contribution. Access to mental health provision for children and young people, through CAMHS, is good overall. There is evidence of service improvement work to improve transitions for young people, however agency managers acknowledge that further improvements are required.

21. Social care case files include key decisions and records of activity in relation to contacts with the family. However the recording system does not allow appropriate drawing together of information, analysis, decision-making and implementation. This is acknowledged by staff, who work hard to overcome the discontinuities and repetition within the systems. These efforts are not successful and do not assist in driving up standards of analysis and evaluation in the work undertaken. Recording is mostly descriptive and often lacks analytical rigour.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (Adequate)

22. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are adequate. The council and broader partnership of statutory agencies provide leadership in safeguarding children, but this is recognised as requiring further improvement, particularly under the direction of the LCSB. Information sharing protocols, such as those used in the multi-agency risk assessment committee (MARAC), are good. There is improvement in practitioners' understanding of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) thresholds and approach. Improvements in ensuring feedback from service providers to referrers and other significantly involved agencies are acknowledged as necessary. Statutory requirements are followed by agencies

and lines of accountability within those agencies are clear. Local first line managers in children's social care are visible and supportive of their staff. Practice challenge and improvement are not specifically evident although newly qualified social staff have positive learning opportunities, including shadowing, mentoring and co-working arrangements in their first year of post qualifying practice. There is a developing understanding of the presence of new and emerging communities, but the implications for training and the delivery of services are not yet fully taken into account.

23. The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is satisfactory. Progress is being made in its use. The pace needs to be sustained and accelerated, using, for example, the development of the electronic CAF. There is satisfactory understanding and implementation of thresholds, although these are not always consistently applied across all teams. Locality teams are potentially a powerful arrangement for driving significant further improvements in coordinated and targeted support for children and their families. There is evidence that earlier intervention could have been significant in addressing the safeguarding needs of children where long standing emotional harm and neglect were factors. Those parents and carers confirm that earlier and more consistent support is needed in these circumstances. Assured access to earlier assessment and targeted intervention towards the identification of likely safeguarding needs requires further development alongside continued support, beyond the period when needs are at their most critical, to further reduce the rate of re-referrals.

24. The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, LSCB and local partnerships demonstrate a clear commitment to promoting diversity and equality and have extensive knowledge of local needs and populations. There is a good focused provision for young asylum seekers. However, the way individual information relating to culture, religion, disability and language is recorded in case records is variable and the weight or priority given to these factors in case planning is sometimes difficult to ascertain. Hotspots of anti-social behaviour are known and there are good links with vulnerable families, particularly those where domestic violence and substance abuse might have an impact on children's safety. Through surveys, a significant proportion of children and young people say that, although reducing, they remain concerned about bullying. Partners take bullying very seriously. Much is being done to tackle cyber-bullying. However, unlike the evaluation of racist incidents, the analysis of bullying incidents by age, gender, faith, cultural background or sexual orientation is not comprehensive.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

25. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and young people is adequate. Leadership shown across the partnership has resulted in a shared vision and agreed priorities for improvement. Statutory requirements are met including those for care assessment, planning, review and social worker visiting. Managers have a track record of improvement in most areas of service provision, including placement stability and the effectiveness of adoption for younger children. The number of children in residential care and placed out of county has been reduced since the Joint Area Review in 2007 identified this as an issue to be addressed. More children are now placed in agency foster care than in residential provision and the quality of service is suitably monitored. The local authority adoption and fostering service and a residential special school run by the local authority have been judged to be good in the most recent Ofsted inspections. The local authority's residential children's homes have improved and most are now judged to be at least satisfactory overall. Two of the authority's homes were judged inadequate in their 2009 inspection and appropriate action has been taken to address the issues. There is a good service for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people requiring support and some carers and young people report that the 16+ service is not as responsive to some young people as it needs to be. The Education Service for looked after children is widely understood and well linked to school improvement. The provision for children educated other than at school is appropriate. Although the extent to which looked after children catch up with their peers varies between different subjects and key stages, most looked after children make good progress in relation to their starting points.

26. Outcomes for children and young people who are looked after are adequate across the five every child matters outcomes. The number of children and young people looked after has risen in recent months, the major reason for which is the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers. The council recognises that it has a high threshold for children to be accommodated, but projects, such as Multi Systemic Therapy, are being extended positively to improve assessment and support, and to ensure that the correct balance is struck between maintaining safe care at home and the need to be looked after. The quality of care planning in the early weeks of being looked after is generally adequate. The council and the partnership ensure that there is good access to, and take up of, annual health and dental checks for children and young people who are looked after. A suitable range of services to promote sexual health and healthy lifestyles is provided. Children looked after are suitably safeguarded, including when staying in contact with their families or in plans to return home. The use of kinship carers is appropriate, and they are properly monitored as carers.

27. Educational support and guidance provided through Virtual School arrangements are highly regarded by partner agencies and well targeted to need. No looked after children are permanently excluded from school. This continues to be better performance than similar councils. Rates of absence from school for 2008-9 are adequate, in line with national levels, and robust and accurate systems are in place to monitor the absence of looked after children from education. The attainment gap for looked after children is being narrowed in some areas of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, and the proportion of children looked after achieving at least one GCSE is increasing. The proportion of eligible looked after children sitting one or more, or passing five GCSEs at age 16 is adequate, although not consistently improving as the number in the cohort changes year on year. Through the Cambridgeshire Culture commitment a good range of opportunities is made available for looked after children to take up activities to enhance their learning, which is closely targeted and monitored through the Virtual School arrangements.

28. A strongly motivated and experienced independent reviewing officer group enables children and young people to participate in their reviews through a variety of means, including being represented or accompanied by an advocate. Children are regularly involved in making decisions about their own lives. Some looked after children and care leavers are involved in training and appraisal of staff and in the training for Elected Members. Arrangements for corporate parenting are strongly supported, and energetically pursued by committed and well supported elected members, although this is not always apparent to the young people themselves. The views of looked after children have influenced some aspects of how services are provided, for example in securing laptops to support their education.

29. Most care leavers report satisfaction with the support they receive, however some young people and carers regard the service as not sufficiently responsive and a small number of care leavers do not feel that they are living in safe environments. Arrangements to enable young people to remain living with a familiar carer through the 'Staying Put' scheme are in place. The number of apprenticeships and further education opportunities has increased although not yet meeting the council's own target on the number of care leavers in employment, education and training.

30. Attention to equality and diversity is generally evident in individual care planning. However the service is challenged by the need to respond consistently to the cultural needs of the increasingly diverse looked after children population, for example in observing religious ceremonies and festivals in minority ethnic communities. Initiatives such as the 'G2G card' are highly regarded by children and young people looked after as it provides equal opportunities to access leisure and recreation, and they look forward to this scheme resuming. Children with disabilities are generally treated equally; however some parents and carers indicate that communication forums with them are not sufficiently responsive.

31. The number of looked after children and young people given a final warning or conviction compared with all children in the area is low and below the national averages, as is the number of young entrants into the juvenile justice system. Partnership working with the Youth Offending Service to divert children and young people from the risk of crime is expanding well to reach children before they enter this cycle of behaviour or become looked after.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

32. The political and managerial leadership across the council and a range of safeguarding agencies demonstrates good ambition and commitment to service improvement. Highly experienced elected members actively engage as corporate parents and are well supported by senior managers to ensure that the needs of looked after children are appropriately prioritised and service improvement monitored. Progress has been made, notably in the last two years, to re-organise, improve, and strengthen services to looked after children through a combination of projects and service development. Some aspects of these strategies, such as the good quality of fostering and adoption services, the effective change in emphasis towards more local placement and improved ability to deal with complex needs are a significant success. Service specifications and purchasing systems are outcome focused and are now well established. Some key service areas face significant challenge to sustain improvement, for example, most of the council's children's homes only improved to adequate in 2009. The leaving care service is challenged by the increase in their workload and in maintaining consistent quality of provision. Considerable success in recruitment and retention of staff at all levels enables sufficient staffing resources to deliver the service area priorities.

33. Strong partnership is in place across all agencies and services, with clear commitment to prioritise the needs of looked after children at both strategic and operational levels, for example the input from the designated Looked After Children nurse and looked after children psychology support through CAMHS.

Areas for improvement

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

Within three months:

- Ensure that the initial case planning processes within contact referral and assessment teams and transfer arrangements to area teams appropriately meet the needs of children and young people newly looked after.
- Ensure that all care leavers are living in accommodation that is safe.

Within six months:

- Ensure the service is able to respond to the cultural needs of an increasingly diverse looked after children population.
- Improve the range of opportunities for looked after young people and care leavers for access to education, employment and training.
- Ensure that the 16+ service is able to respond to increasing demand for its services appropriately and consistently.

Outcomes for children and young people

35. Services to promote good health among children in care are good. Health partners give priority to looked after children. Once an assessment of health needs has been undertaken, children and young people looked after receive the full range of good quality health services they need in a timely way. Access to initial health assessments and dental checks is good. Access to CAMHS is good across the county. Once a child or family is known to therapy services, generally they can self-refer without a professional referral. Effective measures have been implemented to target specific health needs, including designated nurse support to asylum seekers. Sexual health and healthy lifestyle advice is valued by children and young people. There is inconsistency in funding arrangements with PCTs out of county regarding health assessments for looked after children placed out of the area.

36. Children and young people in care are adequately safeguarded in their placements. Improvement in reducing the number of placement changes experienced by children and their carers and families is commendable and continues to be better than similar authorities and the national average. Children aged under 16 also experience stability broadly in line with comparable averages although the percentage of children in foster care or placed for adoption is lower than comparators. The reported timeliness of reviews of children's care needs was poor at 77.7% in 2008/09. However, an audit by the council found that this was due to inaccurate reporting caused by information technology difficulties and the performance information provided by the council indicates that 95.3% of reviews are held on time. A higher proportion of children are placed out of county than in both similar authorities and on average nationally; these out of county placements are effectively monitored. A challenging target to increase the numbers of looked after children adopted is being exceeded, despite increasing numbers of looked after children.

37. Initial assessment and case management processes do not always ensure that the care planning needs of children at the early stages of entry to the care system are consistent. There are some difficulties in transferring looked after children to longer term caseworkers due to capacity issues in long-term teams and competing planning pressures which are magnified in those cases where there are legal proceedings and child protection work. This issue is recognised by the Independent Reviewing Officer service which is working with casework teams

to ensure more consistent early planning. Care plans are generally up-to-date with suitable multi-agency engagement. However, some care plans and assessments are not specific enough in identifying risks and needs. All looked after children's cases are allocated to suitably qualified social workers and visiting is undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements. Clear joint protocols are in place to manage the risk of, and respond to, children who go missing from care.

38. The impact of services on enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is adequate. Headteachers support the partners' ambition for, and prioritisation of, all looked after children and young people. The gaps in the attainment of looked after children with that of their peers are closing well in some subjects and in some key stages. The progress of looked after children is well monitored and some make good progress. Considerable attention has been given to increasing the range of activities in which looked after children and young people can take part and systems are in place for rigorous monitoring of their impact. All partners acknowledge the need to improve the attendance and educational achievement of looked after children and young people. However, there is not significant improvement in reducing the rate of absence, with 11.5% of looked after children missing 25 days schooling. School improvement partners provide high levels of challenge to schools to support better outcomes for looked after children. The Virtual School is a good resource and driver of improvement across the range of issues relating to education and attainment of children and young people looked after. Personal education plans produced for each child are implemented, reviewed and monitored adequately for individual children. However there is no aggregated data for the number and overall effectiveness of personal education plans.

39. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are good. The G2G leisure and participation access card was popular with looked after children, and gave many children and young people good access to positive activities. Some groups such as 'Just Us' meet regularly across the county and consistently reach an encouraging proportion of children and young people who are not always easy to engage. Teenage looked after young people report a range of socially responsible activities that they have participated in, and have met with senior officers and elected members to discuss their lives and views. However it is not always clear to them what has been the impact of their discussions. The council has signed up to 'The Pledge' which sets out what looked after children will receive in the area and a local version is being developed by looked after young people. Positive steps have been taken in consultation with children and young people, the Advocacy and Participation Team and independent reviewing officers to ensure child friendly participation in looked after children reviews, including a young person's care plan. The number of looked after young people given a final warning or conviction compared with all children in the area has reduced for a third year running and highlights the effective joint working between youth offending agencies and the police. Examples of projects such as the North City Boys Club are commendable.

40. The impact of agencies in enabling looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being is adequate. The number of young people not in education employment and training is small; however progress to engage young people in education, employment and training has fallen. Transition planning is satisfactory but some young people indicate that they do not think their 16+ workers are accessible or are making a difference to their lives. The proportion of young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers, active to the Care Leaving Team caseload, is relatively high for a rural area, and of this cohort, many are recent arrivals. There are good liaison relationships with the Home Office to support their economic well being. The quality of work with these young people by the Leaving Care Team has been commended in the High Court. Provision for care leavers is self assessed as 100% suitable accommodation. However a small number of young people raised concerns that their accommodation is neither safe nor suitable. Although a common service specification has just been implemented, there is a lack of a county-wide agreement between lead agencies on how to approach suitable accommodation.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

41. Service responsiveness is adequate. The needs of looked after children are reviewed appropriately, and this is leading to beneficial changes in the services provided. However not all services are of a good quality, for example local residential provision. Resources have been re-aligned to promote more local provision capable of meeting complex needs, but in the interim period while this strategy is taking effect, there is continued reliance on services that are further away from children's home area. The advocacy scheme in partnership with the National Youth Advisory Service facilitates the making of a complaint, although few complaints are made formally by looked after children. Children, parents, and carers benefit from responsive services, but some report that changes of social worker are disruptive, that some workers do not return calls and cannot be contacted and that where they reported these concerns nothing happened. There is no evidence that information of this nature arising in individual cases is clearly monitored.

42. The assessment of and direct work with looked after children is adequate. Assessments are mostly timely and identify most needs of children. The quality of analysis does not always identify risks or significant areas requiring improvement or change. There is some evidence of managerial supervision on case files, but it is not always apparent on the electronic case file system that each stage of work has been signed off by a manager. Care plans are generally clear, but there is evidence from audit by the Independent Reviewing Service that a proportion of actions identified within plans do not make sufficient progress between statutory reviews. Good support is provided by and to foster carers, who are able to readily access good training. There is a good range of service to children with disabilities, however some parents and carers are disenchanted with the quality of service and do not believe they are listened to. The practice of holding 'open to review' the cases of children who regularly

receive short breaks, rather than allocated to a named worker for the period between reviews, does not provide social work continuity to the child or family.

43. Arrangements for planning, case review and recording are adequate with an improved focus on meeting statutory requirements. Plans do not always include robust analysis or evidence of good planning informing a placement matching process. However there is good attention given to the needs of the child in exploring the possibilities of return to their family or to a kinship carer, and to considering and seeking permanent placement where necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

44. Leadership and management of services for looked after children and young people are good overall. Political and managerial leadership across the partnership is effective in putting into place the building blocks to improve outcomes for looked after children, with clear ambition and prioritisation for services. Corporate parenting shows clear commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of looked after children and care leavers. Most partnership arrangements are now strong. Most of the essential requirements of the service are secured, but improvement is still needed to ensure the good quality and consistency of in-house residential provision and a consistent 16+ service.

45. Performance monitoring is adequate but is not aided by the case management information system, which does not enable managers to monitor the quality of work. Looked after children social workers are qualified and some are experienced, but the management of a rising number of complex cases or those proceeding to adoption places strains on their capacity. There is a strong drive for an improving workforce. Kinship and foster carers are very positive about the training they receive.

46. User engagement is good, with strong commitment across the partnership. Children and young people report that they are generally treated with respect. Effective joint commissioning arrangements are in place with appropriate monitoring of external placements linked to the Every Child Matters outcomes. All placements are closely monitored by contract staff in respect of placement aims and whether these aims are being achieved.

47. Partnership working is good, both at a strategic and operational level. Voluntary organisations play a significant and valued role in the county, but not all indicate they are well supported by statutory partners. There are examples of effective partnership working aimed at high risk situations. Looked after young people now play a part of a process of reviewing services in the Supported Housing Service Specification. Joint funding has helped develop good coverage now achieved by the Psychology Service.

48. Value for money is good. The council has appropriately reviewed high cost out of area placements to ensure that they best meet children's needs.

49. The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate. There are extensive consultation opportunities with some examples of young people influencing service development and decision-making and considerable efforts made to respond to their views. In some instances, however, insufficient attention is paid to children's cultural, ethnic origin or religious background. The council is well aware of the diverse ethnic and cultural range and needs of its children and young people population. Parents and carers of children with disabilities report services have improved and most parents appreciate the level of support they now receive. The Aiming High for Disabled Children initiative is starting to show improvement to services.

Record of main findings: Cambridgeshire

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

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Good
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Adequate
Enjoying and achieving	Adequate
Making a positive contribution	Good
Economic well-being	adequate
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Looked after children are safeguarded	Adequate
Leadership and management	
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	Good