

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Newcastle

Inspection dates: 23 January – 3 February 2012

Reporting inspector Brendan Parkinson HMI

Age group: All

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 68 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in December 2010
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from Newcastle NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT), Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Outstanding (Grade 1) | A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements |
| Good (Grade 2) | A service that exceeds minimum requirements |
| Adequate (Grade 3) | A service that only meets minimum requirements |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Inadequate (Grade 4) | A service that does not meet minimum requirements |
|----------------------|---|

Service information

4. Newcastle has a resident population of approximately 58,500 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing just over 20% of the total population of the area. In January 2011, 21.6% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 22.5% in England overall. Some 18% of pupils speak English as an additional language. Bengali, Urdu and Arabic are the most recorded commonly spoken community languages in the area, 3.9% of pupils are of Pakistani background.
5. Newcastle has 98 schools comprising 72 primary schools, three middle schools (including one academy), 11 secondary schools (including three academies), six special and short stay schools including the pupil referral unit (PRU) and Newcastle Bridges general hospital school. Early Years service provision is co-ordinated through 18 Sure Start children's centres and delivered predominantly through 78 nursery and primary schools and five community nurseries. Services are also delivered through a range of private, independent and voluntary settings and registered childminders.
6. The Newcastle Children's Trust was set up in June 2009, after the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Executive agreed formally to become the Newcastle Children's Trust Board. The Trust includes representatives of Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Primary Care Trust services and Northumbria Police, and from all other appropriate agencies. The Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board became independently chaired in January 2010, bringing together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the area that provide safeguarding services.
7. Social care services for children have 390 foster carers, four local authority children's homes and 52 externally commissioned providers delivering residential care and fostering agency services. Community-based children's services are provided by six initial response teams and seven assessment and monitoring teams, supported by area-wide teams for children with complex needs, youth offending, adoption, fostering and six teams for looked after children and young people leaving care. There is an emergency out of hours service providing cover for Newcastle. Other family support services are delivered through 18 children's centres and extended services in schools. Some services are provided or coordinated through children's services, such as the families at risk intensive support service (FRISS), evidence-based parenting programmes and other targeted services commissioned from the voluntary and community sector.
8. In January 2012 there were 551 looked after children. They comprise 124 children less than five years of age, 373 children of school age (5–16), 54

post-16 young people and a total of 91 with care leaver status. Newcastle uses a virtual school approach in its support of the learning of looked after children. In January 2012 there were 380 children and young people who were the subject of a child protection plan. The highest categories of registration were emotional abuse at 41.3% and neglect at 39.2%, physical abuse at 9.7% and sexual abuse at 5%.

9. Commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care are carried out by Newcastle NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT). The main providers of acute hospital services are The Great North Children's Hospital (Royal Victoria Infirmary) and the Freeman Hospital, through Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Community-based child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are provided by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust. In-patient CAMHS are provided by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust. Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust provides community health services.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

10. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is good. Newcastle City Council and its key partners have made substantial and continuous progress in recent years. Firm progress has been achieved in identifying, driving and monitoring key improvements in targeted and specialist services for safeguarding children and young people in the area. The Children's Trust and Newcastle Safeguarding Children Boards (NSCB) have been effective, establishing solid foundations through which the ambitions for children have been articulated and improved standards of performance achieved. Priorities are well articulated. Challenge and support are provided by partner agency members in appropriate measure. The monitoring of performance is well established, although it is recognised that further developments toward improved qualitative evaluations of the impact of services are required.
11. Arrangements for the overview, scrutiny and the championing of the safeguarding needs of children are well evidenced with the necessary and sustained commitment from elected members in place. The core quality assurance arrangements, including systematic auditing in social care as well as through the NSCB, are extensive and fully embedded at all levels. There is considerable evidence of audit findings informing service delivery improvements as well as planning and commissioning activity. The views of children and young people in the city are sought, although further improvements are required to ensure that more effective consultation and dialogue with representative bodies, such as the Youth Council and Youth Parliament takes place. Currently their involvement is not always meaningful and sufficiently representative of the needs of all children and young people within the city.
12. The development and consequent implementation of a commissioning culture are sound and improving. Substantial progress towards a more effective targeting of the investment in early intervention services has been undertaken in the last year. The local authority has further provided additional significant funding to the central government grant allocation. Senior managers are realistic in their recognition that further improvements remain necessary as well as desirable. The clear aspiration is to support the development of new methods of working, a number of which are in development, as well as establishing more efficient and effective services.
13. At an operational level there is much constructive, active and timely engagement between agencies. However, full acceptance between all key partner agencies that all work with children carries some degree of risk is yet to be achieved. Partnership activity involving the greater

implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) has been a significant success story within the city. Sound, constructive and stable inter-agency relationships and plans are seen at strategic and operational levels of activity. Notably strong support is received from children's centres and many schools in the area, as well as from primary health services, although this has been inhibited by the limited capacity in some primary health settings.

14. Performance in almost all key areas has shown sustained improvement over the last two years. Compliance has been achieved and maintained in the delivery of core social care duties in the protection of children, well supported by key partner agencies. Children in need of protection and safeguarding are identified, although assessments remain variable in the quality of analysis, evidencing the impact of children's wishes and feelings, and in achieving greater specificity in support or protection plans. Children's social care has also achieved and maintained front line workforce stability following an extended period of difficulty, although some parts of the workforce have staff with lesser levels of post qualifying experience.
15. Further improvements in the effective coordination of risk and information management between children's services and Northumbria Police, including strategy discussions, are recognised as necessary. Recent assessments of need are at least adequate and some are better. In continuing to address these issues, greater consistency is needed from operational managers and reviewing officers in ensuring effective oversight and the driving forward of evidence-based plans for children. Robust arrangements are in place to ensure effective inter-agency working to address the urgent protection needs of children out of hours. Modernisation of this service is underway but further improvement in telephone access arrangements are yet to be achieved.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

16. The capacity for improvement is good. A strong platform of the key mechanisms for driving and monitoring service improvement has been established in Newcastle over the past few years. This has followed the renewal of strategic frameworks, governance arrangements and strategic and business plans at all levels. All service planning and performance arrangements have been refocused with greater integration and dialogue evident between the Newcastle Children's Trust Board (NCTB), the Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) and other mechanisms, such as overview and scrutiny, community safety partnership and the Wellbeing for Life Board. Extensive updating has also taken place toward achieving a more thorough understanding of need and demand through, for example, a use of the outcomes based accountability approach and the 'refresh' of the joint strategic needs analysis in 2010.

17. Many improvements in outcomes have been achieved in the last two years. These include improved targeting of timely initial assessments; reductions in children remaining subject to child protection plans for more than two years; reductions in the rate of re-referrals for the same or similar reasons; and improved targeting of those children most in need of protection. All areas for development identified in previous unannounced inspections have been acted upon, although some elements are yet to be consistently implemented. These mostly relate to the quality of assessments and evidencing the impact of children's views. Some outcome measures are yet to show substantial improvement, for example in the reduction of the number of children subject to repeat child protection plans. An improved and enhanced focus on areas of activity has been achieved, particularly in the area of domestic violence. Intensive interventions with a track record of success have been maintained and extended, including the family intervention project (FIP) and family group conferencing approaches. Further work is required to improve the preventative focus on children affected by a local area culture characterised in part by alcohol consumption – and the so-called “night time economy”.
18. Senior local authority and partner agency managers are clearly ambitious in seeking further improvements in outcomes for children and in increasing the pace and focus of service improvement. Capacity in both children's social care and through the sustained investment in early intervention services are sufficient to meet needs. Targeting the small number of communities characterised by intense deprivation and very high rates of childhood vulnerability is now taking place. The impact of disadvantage is stark in these areas, presenting medium to long term challenges for all partner agencies in sustaining levels of investment. The extensive and vibrant voluntary and community sector makes a significant contribution to the safeguarding of, and improvements to, the quality of life for many children. More recently some of the smaller organisations have experienced serious difficulties in maintaining existing levels of service as a consequence of the temporary nature of many funding streams, and the increased performance monitoring requirements of the local authority. The combination of these poses a potential threat to sustaining this responsive and diverse sector in its current form.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- improve the effectiveness of arrangements between the Northumbria Police and the Newcastle City Council children's social care for the

risk management of information where there may be concerns about children, as well as for the contribution of the Police at strategy discussions.

Within three months:

- maximise the impact of children and young people's contributions to, and safely include them in, child protection decision-making and planning
- ensure the consistent application of high quality analysis within assessments and the production of sufficiently detailed plans with clear outcome measures
- ensure that supervision of health care staff is suitably recorded within the child's records
- ensure the quality of supervision and formal review arrangements are of a consistently high standard across social care, that discussion and direction in case planning is recorded and any delay or drift in the implementation of plans is challenged
- ensure that the domestic violence prevention programme has sufficient capacity to respond in a timely way to current and projected levels of demand
- improve the effectiveness of consultation and engagement with children and young people at all levels of service monitoring and development
- ensure that voluntary and community sector commissioned services performance monitoring arrangements are proportionate to the service provided.

Within six months:

- ensure an effective balance between the impact of strategies for the economic development of the city and those for the safeguarding and welfare of vulnerable children and young people in the city
- improve the understanding and significance of the strengths, needs and risks arising from the specific ethnicity, religion and culture of children in the development of plans to safeguard and protect them.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 2 (Good)

20. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are good. The local authority and key partners give a high priority to safeguarding and child protection work. The identification of children most in need of protection is effective, particularly when concerns are referred to the initial response service (IRS). Effective strategy meetings take place in almost all cases where there are concerns for children, and although the Police do not attend all meetings due to a lack of capacity they ensure information is shared in advance. Mostly, other agencies prioritise attendance and actively contribute to the discussions. Child protection enquiries are well coordinated resulting in prompt decisions about risk and protection. The consideration of children and young people's views and feelings is emerging in assessments and plans, although this has been slow in implementation. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection. Work has also been undertaken to establish the views of children and young people in relation to whether they feel safe at home and in the community.
21. Schools offer a supportive and protective environment to vulnerable pupils. Early signs of concerns, such as late arrival, poor attendance, neglect and bullying are identified in a timely way. Initiatives, such as placement of child in a small nurture group at school and 'time out' cards, have addressed some bullying issues and support young carers in balancing the demands on them. 'Team around the child' (TAC) meetings are used well in schools to coordinate early help. However, schools are not always effective in identifying the difficulties individual children have, leading to delay in providing help in some cases. It is acknowledged that there are waiting lists for CAMHS and that some schools hold waiting lists for their allocated educational psychologist. However, parents spoken with during the inspection said that support and intervention for younger siblings of their families has been helpfully provided much earlier in the primary schools than had been for older children.
22. There is close monitoring of children missing education, children with poor attendance and children educated at home who might be at risk. The safeguarding children at risk – prevention and action (SCARPA) service provides a high quality service for young people who go missing from home and may be at risk of exploitation. Good outcomes include increased risk awareness and reduced risk taking behaviours. Inspection outcomes from services and settings are generally good or better. The large majority of schools and settings inspected by Ofsted are judged to be at least good for keeping children safe. The children's homes operated by the council

were all rated good or better in recent inspections, for both overall effectiveness and staying safe outcomes. Likewise the most recent inspections of the adoption and the fostering services judged the overall quality and the staying safe as good. Private fostering arrangements are also well managed and effective with assessments appropriately presented to the Community Arrangements Panel for approval, which are then regularly and independently reviewed. The local authority designated officer (LADO) role is effectively utilised. A recent increase in the LADO resource has provided necessary capacity for training the children's workforce as well as the management of allegations. Complaints are well managed with improvements in the timeliness of investigations, and messages from consequent learning appropriately disseminated. Robust systems are also in place to ensure safe recruitment of staff.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

23. The quality of provision for safeguarding children and young people in Newcastle is adequate. Early intervention and prevention services offer a wide range of targeted support to families, with strong collaborative working by partner agencies using the common assessment framework (CAF) and TAC or 'team around the family' (TAF) approach. Good outcomes are being achieved for some families involved. Parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the help they receive from these services. The CAF is increasingly well established across the city and effectively used by most agencies, including those in the voluntary sector. However, the increase in early help has yet to impact on the numbers of children referred to children's social care. Some parents who spoke to inspectors also said that they had not received the help from social care when they needed it, resulting in more intrusive child protection interventions when matters had consequently reached crisis point.
24. The threshold for access to children's social care service is understood by partner agencies. Centralisation of contacts and referrals in the IRS has led to clarity and consistency. Contacts are screened promptly and thoroughly. Those failing to meet the threshold for assessment are often referred to the supporting families plus panel to arrange and monitor alternative support services. A locally valued triage arrangement by which risk assessments were undertaken jointly between the Police and social care on a high volume of child concern notifications (CCNs) from the Police, has recently ceased following a restructuring within the Police service. All child protection and other complex assessments are undertaken by qualified social workers, with senior practitioners supporting those less experienced to ensure that appropriate levels of expertise are being applied. Supervision of social workers is regular and of an improving quality, but social work practice continues to be of variable quality.

25. Assessments seen during the inspection were at least adequate but not all demonstrated a sufficiently thorough consideration of prior involvement, including any patterns of concerns. While there is much evidence that children are seen and talked with, including being seen on their own, there is limited evidence of their understanding or their view of plans for their protection. Young people are not routinely invited to child protection conferences but some young people are invited to attend core groups. The broad outlines of child protection plans made at initial conference are appropriate, but these are subsequently not always translated into detailed action plans with clear timescales. Recent changes made are aimed at improving this. The monitoring and review arrangements for the progress of plans are assured and timely. However, some children have not received the response needed, and have experienced repeated child protection plans. In a few cases sampled there is also more recent evidence of drift. Reviewing officers recognise that challenges need to be more explicit in review records to ensure plans remain on track.

The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe

Grade 2 (Good)

26. The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe is good. The NHS North of Tyne Strategic Safeguarding Group provides assurance to the PCT Board on safeguarding issues across the North of Tyne area. There is a clear commissioning policy on safeguarding children and young people, with good attendance at the NSCB. Executive leads describe the NSCB as an effective multi-agency partnership with a corporate ethos stemming from good partner member relationships. Three local authorities, including Newcastle, share ownership of the appropriately constituted and effective child death overview panel (CDOP).
27. Appropriate resourcing, line management and supervision arrangements enable the designated and named safeguarding professionals across the city to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Good progress is being made towards ensuring access to, and attendance at, safeguarding training. Particularly high levels of compliance within the Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in relation to mandatory training are noted. Arrangements in providing safeguarding supervision to health practitioners working with families with child protection or child in need plans in place is variable and this is not routinely documented in the child's health record.
28. There is good partnership working between the acute trust and the children and families team with the named nurse regularly meeting with social care service managers. There is an increasing awareness of the impact of adult mental health on children with a risk assessment assessing the impact on, and safety of, the child routinely completed with further enhancements planned. Child protection medicals and examinations following alleged sexual abuse are carried out by suitably trained staff in a

purpose built, child friendly accredited environment. Good arrangements are in place within accident and emergency (A&E) departments and urgent care to safeguard children and young people, with checks for repeat attendance, GP and school details obtained as well as a full history of the incident or reason for attendance. This includes those presenting as a result of deliberate self harm, for whom there are robust self harm pathways. The recent implementation of a flag alert system for children who have a child protection plan is helpful, although it was incomplete at the time of the inspection. Effective paediatric liaison takes place, with all attendances of children and young people under 16 notified to GPs, health visitors or school nurses.

29. Good partnership working and engagement with the Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) services leads to early support being offered. However, access to the CAMHS can take up to six months for treatment to commence. In-patient care is provided locally with appropriate capacity for emergency admissions. Arrangements to transfer children from the health visiting service to the school nursing service are good. All Newcastle schools have access to a named school nurse who can offer drop in clinics in schools and in some schools they can also offer advice on contraception. Good support is offered to young people who have attended A&E as a result of drinking alcohol. A one to one appointment is offered to explore the young person's drinking patterns through the use of an alcohol screening tool. Community services are accessible for those who misuse alcohol or other substances through Streetwise, "DnA" and the CAMHS specialist substance misuse team.
30. Good support is available to young women who are pregnant and who require additional support for their emotional health and well-being or who misuse alcohol or substances. Support services are also available for young men who are, or are about to become, parents. Good partnership working between the local authority and midwifery services helps to protect unborn children. A regular multi-agency maternity safeguarding meeting takes place to consider and monitor all cases of concern. Sex and relationship education is of good quality, supported well by the school nursing and contraception and sexual health (CASH) services, although Newcastle continues to be higher than North East and national rates for teenage pregnancy, despite a 10% reduction since 1998.
31. Some children and young people experience lengthy waits for access to occupational therapy support, particularly for assessments and project managing of housing adaptations. Children with complex health needs receive good support from well established, effective community children's nursing teams. The service delivers an award winning 'hospital at home' service.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

32. Ambition and prioritisation of safeguarding services are good. The local authority and its partners provide effective and ambitious leadership through the Newcastle Children's Trust Board (CTB) and NSCB. Priorities, based on analysis of local need, are set out clearly in strategic, business and action plans and are understood by staff. The relationship between the CTB and the NSCB is characterised by mature, respectful and effective dialogue. This is exemplified by their joint sponsoring of events and mutual challenge in relation to their respective plans. Successful coordination and promotion of partnership services toward the most vulnerable have been led and promoted by the Boards. These include further targeted early intervention in mental health through TAMHS, ensuring the solid platform of support through children's centres and Sure Start, and the youth inclusion work of the Youth Offending Team. Representation is extensive but does not extend to children and young people, and the Board members recognise that the voice of children and young people have yet to make a significant impact on the design of services.
33. City council elected members have a sound understanding of the issues facing children's services with effective oversight and scrutiny taking place through the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee. The portfolio holder and deputy both support and hold senior managers to account. City council commitments are exemplified by the additional investment in early and targeted intervention, almost £1 million for 2012-13; sustained and increased funding of front line children's social care services; and expenditure targeted toward areas of high deprivation and disadvantage. There is high confidence in senior managers with honest communication over the agreed issues of significance. The same managers are also highly regarded by staff and provide strong leadership.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

34. Leadership and management of safeguarding services are good. Very effective workforce planning has led to improved recruitment and retention of staff in social care. While many social workers in the IRS have less than two years post qualifying experience in statutory social work, they are supported by recently established senior practitioners, strengthening this potentially vulnerable service area. Social workers' caseloads are manageable and they value the ease of access to training and encouragement towards post qualification awards. It is acknowledged that the children's services workforce is not fully representative of the service user population and data on recruitment and diversity are regularly monitored. Training needs are identified through supervision and the annual appraisal and a good range of training is also offered through the NSCB. Action plans have been thoroughly implemented following the local

serious case reviews with considerable evidence of service refocusing as a consequence.

35. Service planning takes into account the needs of children and young people from minority groups. Regular information and training conferences for parents, carers and professionals raise awareness of the needs of children with disabilities and influence plans for service delivery. Support is given to a range of voluntary organisations through funding to meet minority needs. The training of a number of 'champions' for each of the key minority communities in Newcastle (Hindu, Chinese, Bangladeshi) has been recognised as a model of good practice. Disabled children act as 'mystery shoppers' with service providers, and the children and young people advisory group has provided the NSCB with their views on safeguarding themes such as domestic violence, substance misuse and knife crime. This link has yet to become fully effective, although firm plans are in place to extend these consultations.
36. Resourcing in children's social care is at acceptable levels and the cabinet member for children's services continues to monitor both the costs and impacts of changing demands. Weaknesses in services, risks and priorities are effectively identified and senior officers and members are kept well informed, particularly during this period of substantial change and challenge for the local authority and all partner agencies. Service commissioning arrangements have recently been refreshed and the new framework is still in its first year, with a wide range of services being externally and internally commissioned. The 'outcome based accountability' (OBA) model supports a clearer focus for commissioners, although the performance monitoring demands on small voluntary and community groups can be high, placing some at risk of exclusion from the new contracting arrangements. While a clear, targeted, driven approach toward early intervention has been taken recently, it has yet to make significant impact on those small number of wards with very high proportions of vulnerable children.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 2 (Good)

37. Performance management and quality assurance are good, with sustained improvement across a wide range of national and local indicators identified for improvement over at least the last three years. Performance monitoring produces a detailed understanding of which indicators have been more challenging for the area. The substantial range of data provides good descriptive information on trends but contains more limited analysis or explanation. Adoption of the OBA model is yet to be fully embedded across council services. A wide range of audit activity takes place within social care and across the partnership overseen by the outstanding drive shown by the standards and effectiveness management group, a sub-group of the NSCB. Themed audits conducted in areas where

there are recognised concerns are providing valuable lessons. The quality of case audits produced by the council for this inspection was generally satisfactory with some good. The former tended to check for compliance with limited consideration of whether outcomes were improving.

38. The multi-agency appreciative enquiry panel considers good practice examples, sharing learning on what works, although this is recent and outcome areas yet to be evident. While supervision in social care takes place regularly, discussion of individual cases is not always sufficiently well recorded on case files and does not always evidence the driving forward of plans. Staff frequently described senior managers, including the Director of Social Care, as visible, knowledgeable and well engaged with the front line staff.

Partnership working

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

39. Partnership working is outstanding with highly effective work seen across the statutory and voluntary sectors at both strategic and operational levels. The substantial increase in the use of the CAF illustrates well the high levels of cooperation between agencies. The benefits achieved through this approach, such as improved information sharing between professionals and coordination of support and consolidation are widely recognised. It is continuing to develop and becoming well established across the city. The extensive multi-agency training in support of this is well received by agencies, including the voluntary sector. Parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about their experiences of receiving services through the CAF approach, strengthening the rationale for the improved focus and investment in this area of work.
40. Thresholds for access to social care services are appropriate in relation to concerns for children and are widely understood, although managers acknowledge that thresholds to specialist assessment and services should continue to be reviewed between partner agencies. Work is underway with those agencies to provide advice and support with the aim of building confidence through case discussions, professional forums, targeted training and briefings, and active case support. There are good partnerships with the voluntary and community sector and some excellent strategic multi-agency work in developing high quality services: for example SCARPA (providing individual support for young people who go missing) and the Respect accredited domestic violence prevention project (DVPP) operated by Barnardo's, working with perpetrators. There has been active and effective development work undertaken in strengthening relationships with the Black and Minority Friends Group and in extending the quality and reach of the safeguarding training on offer and that which is required.
41. The NSCB demonstrates very high levels of influence across all areas where the safety and welfare of children and young people need to be

considered. This is well supported by the outstanding work of the standards and effectiveness monitoring group, and strong links with the Safeguarding Adults Board and Safe Newcastle which facilitate communication and action on findings from serious case reviews relevant to those bodies. The NSCB has identified clear priorities within its current business plan, fully based on an analysis of local need. The NSCB fulfils its statutory requirements and is highly respected by senior officers across partner agencies as well as being influential in its challenge and support of other strategic bodies. Impact has been evident in the drafting of the recent Children and Young People's Plan, and in a recent challenge to Northumbria Police following a reduction in some elements of service following a restructuring of the service. It demonstrates good links with other forums, such as the Safeguarding Adults Board and Safe Newcastle which facilitates effective communication and action on findings from serious case reviews.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

42. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is good. Local authority arrangements for overview, scrutiny and the championing of children deliver essential, unequivocal and a sustained dedication toward looked after children. Performance in almost all outcome areas has shown sustained improvements over the last two years. Among the achievements of the area have been low rates of first time offending, improved education achievement, adoption and placement stability which are at least in line with and often better than similar authorities. Some educational targets have been exceeded and young people achieve better than predicted against their starting point. The corporate parenting arrangements are mature, exhibiting strong commitment and advocacy toward meeting the needs of looked after children.
43. Both the Newcastle Children's Trust Board (NCTB) and the NSCB are effective mechanisms for driving forward improvements in the lives of vulnerable children, including those at risk of becoming, or who are already, looked after. Strong arrangements are in place for the planning of services with exceptionally clear approaches to the retargeting of early intervention services as well as the procurement of generally high quality, performance monitored placements for looked after children. Policies and procedures are appropriate and staff receive good supervision with access to a valued training programme. An emerging strength has been, and continues to be, the implementation of a commissioning culture locally. Statutory functions are being met and no services are deteriorating.
44. There are high numbers of looked after children, including some whose plans had previously been subject to drift, although this has lessened considerably recently, with a positive and strengthening focus on implementing ambitious yet realistic plans in those cases seen during the inspection. There also remain high numbers of children living outside the local authority area, although all but a few live within 20 miles of the city, and for those who do not, there are sound reasons for the location of their placements. Examples were seen during the inspection of sensitive and thoughtful work in ensuring that the needs of children from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and abilities receive parenting commensurate with identified need. However, this is not evidenced in all cases seen by inspectors.
45. Adequate and often better outcomes for many looked after children are being achieved, as well as in most areas of children's safety and well-being. These are sustained and delivered through mature, effective operational relationships between key partner agencies, including the virtual school. Notably, there is sound support from schools and effective

or highly effective health services for children, through the looked after CAMHS and sexual health services through CASH. Efforts to reduce the numbers of looked after children entering the criminal justice system, or becoming looked after as a result of offending, have also been highly successful over a number of years. Almost all children in care, and those receiving leaving care services, report feeling safe or very safe in their current placements. However, capacity at designated nurse level has not been sustained, inhibiting further service development. Improvements in educational achievement of looked after children are evident, although it is recognised that other improvements are required in supporting and ensuring attendance as well as in reducing fixed term exclusions.

46. There are numerous avenues for looked after children to express their views about the service they receive. The engagement of young people in pathway planning has improved recently, although views about the quality of social care support for those leaving care remain varied. Some young adults have felt insufficiently well prepared or supported towards their independence. However, some services are highly valued by this group of young adults, particularly the support provided by housing services as well as the mentoring support within colleges. There are also considerable strengths arising from the local investment in leisure and engagement activities for vulnerable young people, with consequent success being achieved in the personal and social development of many children and young people.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

47. The capacity for improvement is good. The local authority has maintained the necessary capacity and investment in its corporate parenting responsibilities. This has enabled children's services to maintain sustained performance in outcomes for almost all children through the application of high standards and clear expectations. All key partner agencies are very well engaged at operational and strategic levels, particularly through the highly effective multi-agency looked after partnership (MALAP). This provides a focus and drive for setting, implementing, monitoring and reviewing service improvements for this group of children. These high levels of commitment and coordination have contributed to statutory requirements being met and often exceeded, with a very strong record in some key areas, such as placement stability, and a wide range of sustained or improving other outcomes for looked after children. Improvements sought are realistic including the planned target for increasing the number of supported lodgings providers, the implementation of a range of tools to support transition to independence and in extending the responsibility of the virtual school to those over 16 years. These improvements must, however, be set against the sustained rise in the numbers of children becoming looked after, although this rise has, very recently, shown signs of stabilising.

48. The local authority has undertaken a thorough analysis of the profile of the looked after population as well as developing detailed, thorough plans to address a range of challenges; financial, procurement, the recruitment of foster carers and in ensuring a timely implementation of care plans. It has a clear understanding of needs and risks as well as showing some early evidence of impact in stemming the previously persistent rise in the numbers of looked after children. The placement panel is effective. Leadership and coordination of activity in this service area is well evidenced through the impressive arrangements and drive provided through the looked after children programme board contributing further to this high quality and improving service.
49. The development of a pan-regional commissioning and procurement partnership with other local authorities offers clear financial benefits as well as a greater focus on quality outcomes, although the full impact of this is yet to be fully realised. The local authority is clear that the high service costs need to be reduced further but are equally, and appropriately, clear that placement decisions must continue to be primarily based on meeting the needs of individual looked after children. The pace of change has, thus far, been moderate and senior managers are clear that this must be increased by reducing the numbers coming into care, achieving more focused and cost efficient residential placements, and in ensuring that children who do not need to be looked after should cease to be so, where this is in the child's welfare interests.

Areas for improvement

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

Immediately:

- secure effective and sustainable capacity for the role of the designated looked after children nurse.

Within three months:

- improve the quality and effectiveness of analysis and planning in addressing the strengths, risks and needs of children relating to their ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds
- ensure that reviews of care plans incorporate effective communication with each child, wherever possible, and that plans then demonstrate the impact of the child's views and feelings about their lives, placements and their wishes for the future
- improve the quality and effective implementation of pathway plans, including the provision of a comprehensive summary of their health

needs and circumstances, in supporting the needs and aspirations of care leavers

- ensure the health of all looked after children, including those placed in other local authority and primary care trust settings, is reviewed in a timely way.

Within six months:

- extend the reach of consultation, liaison and communication pathways to the widest range of looked after children in informing all further service improvements
- improve the attendance of looked after children and reduce the number experiencing fixed term exclusion within their educational settings.

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

Being healthy

Grade 2 (Good)

51. Good arrangements are in place to assess and maintain the health of looked after children and young people. While most children receive a timely initial health assessment conducted by a paediatrician, some do not. While the reasons for this are known, progress has been delayed due to lack of consistent capacity through the looked after children designated nurse role. The looked after children CAMHS provides effective consultation and support to social workers and carers to advise on placement matching and in maintaining placement stability. This helps to provide consistency and continuity of treatment for children placed both within the city as well as those placed externally. Looked after young people have good access to sexual health services through general advice, individual contact with a peripatetic nurse and specialist support from the dedicated looked after children sexual health worker through ASPIRE or, if necessary, the scan clinic. Accessible substance misuse services are provided through universal services as well as positive support from the DnA substance misuse worker via ASPIRE.
52. The health looked after children team is actively engaged in the training of carers and social workers, with additional training on trauma and attachment provided by the looked after children CAMHS. Consequently, professionals and carers working with young people understand the importance of good quality health reviews, targeted health promotion and the need to address the emotional health and well-being of this vulnerable group of children. The current arrangements for providing young people leaving care with a copy of their final health review does not provide young people with the sufficiently comprehensive summary of their healthcare. There is also limited involvement of the health team with the pathway planning arrangements.

Staying safe

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

53. Practice in relation to ensuring that looked after children are safe, is outstanding. Services for children and young people on the edge of care are wide ranging, they effectively manage risk and prevent children becoming looked after where appropriate. Imaginative programmes include 'The Incredible Years' programme, aimed at those under five. All cases seen during the inspection demonstrated that children and young people in care are there appropriately, with the necessary legal protection. In some cases high quality viability assessments had been undertaken prior to the making of placement decisions. Robust arrangements are in place to prepare for possible court action with the local authority legal

services fully involved from an early stage. The public law outline is used in a highly effective way.

54. Strategic multi-agency accountability for looked after children is strong. This work is delivered through MALAP and at an operational level the care team meetings are effective, routinely involving a good range of agencies delivering services that lead to positive individual outcomes. Decision making conferences routinely involve parents and carers. These are informed by a comprehensive range of assessments ensuring that risks and strengths are fully considered. Most looked after children live in stable, good quality, caring and supportive placements that meet their needs and result in positive outcomes. Young people seen by inspectors spoke warmly about their placements.
55. Sustained placement stability is a real strength in Newcastle with sufficient choice of placement to meet need, and performance is in line with, or better than, national averages. Placements outside Newcastle are closely monitored with standards of contract compliance, and children placed are further safeguarded by careful matching, assured social work visits and outcomes feedback. Some outstanding life story work supports adoption placements and all children have been placed within required timescales in the current year. All children are placed in provision that is judged to be at least adequate and most is good or better. The quality of Newcastle's four in house residential homes is either good or outstanding and the fostering and adoption services have both been judged as good.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2 (Good)

56. Outcomes for looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve are good. The looked after children education service (LACES) and the well-established virtual school are highly regarded by schools. They have sound leadership with areas needing improvement known and addressed through a rigorous process of self-evaluation and action planning. The oversight is particularly strong for those children of compulsory school age placed both within and outside of the city. Most looked after children attend good schools and the best possible schools are sought on their entry to care. The virtual school is registered as an examination centre enabling all young people to have the opportunity to succeed in a range of GCSE examinations. Students and designated teachers can access the virtual teaching and learning environment (VTLE) where relevant professional advice and resources are available.
57. From a low starting point on entry to school, children make good progress in their primary schools and results at age 11 are better than the national average for looked after children. Action to increase the rate of progress in literacy and numeracy has been effective through, for example, the Letterbox club and one to one tuition in schools supporting almost all children to improve their literacy levels above chronological age in the last

academic year. At secondary level, results are also above average for the proportion of young people achieving five good GCSEs. In 2011, GCSE targets were met and young people achieved well against their predicted grades. Although results for looked after children are well below those of all young people in Newcastle, good progress has been made in narrowing the attainment gap. Some looked after children are currently identified as gifted or talented. Whilst it is good practice that awareness should be raised, monitoring of provision and outcomes for this cohort of young people is insufficiently robust.

58. In surveys, the majority of looked after children say that they enjoy school and attend regularly. While overall attendance has improved, it remains below similar authorities and below the attendance rate for all young people in Newcastle. There were no permanent exclusions over the past two years; however fixed-term exclusions remain above average. Children and young people's achievements are regularly celebrated. There is access to a wide range of art, leisure and recreational activities both in and outside of school. Good additional opportunities are provided through the extended schools programme, the 'Max Card' which provides free access to all council leisure facilities, and through the personal education fund (designed to meet the children's diverse interests and needs).

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement

Grade 2 (Good)

59. Arrangements for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are good. The Viewpoint system for collecting children's views is well established and provides a good source of data which is used well to consider equality and diversity matters. The data collected reveals generally high levels of satisfaction, although care leavers are less positive about the support received at key transition points. The data is also used well to improve the quality of service delivery showing some clear concerns, for example, over pathway plans, 'sleepover' policy and requests for medicals not to take place during school time. 'Voices for Choices', the Children in Care Council, is a small but highly effective group of young people which has shown impact with the corporate parenting group focusing on evaluating the progress made in implementing the Pledge. However, it is yet to provide a fully representative voice for all looked after children. Considerable recent achievements include making a DVD for looked after children supporting those wishing to make a complaint.
60. Feedback on placements is generally positive and the majority of young people say they feel happy and settled where they live. There is good participation of young people in their reviews. The well-established complaints process is used effectively to improve services. Advocacy for looked after children who complain is provided through the National Youth Advisory service. Low offending rates have been achieved through the

very effective use of preventative and targeted work through the youth offending team. Residential care staff, including in-house and some commissioned providers such as 'Right Trak', now deliver restorative justice approaches with looked after children and young people ensuring that they appropriately diverted from the criminal justice system.

Economic well-being

Grade 2 (Good)

61. Looked after children and young people's economic well-being outcomes are good. Work is well coordinated between the leaving care team, schools and Connexions advisers to support young people in choosing positive options from the age of 14, as is support for young people with a disability. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training has recently exceeded the national average; a significant achievement in the region. 'Trinity Solutions', the city council's training arm, offer suitable post-16 experiences for young people with learning, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some young people reported that they were not positive about the implementation of their pathway plans, both through Viewpoint as well as during this inspection. This is acknowledged by the council and is being addressed. Plans have been re-designed and recent ones seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to good. The less effective plans were insufficiently clear on planned outcomes, timescales and those responsible for implementation.
62. Young people who attend school sixth forms make good progress on their A-Levels courses. The 'Choices Together' project provides effective support for young people seeking to enter higher education and local universities offer 'ambassadors' to guide young people through the practicalities of university life. Almost one in seven of care leavers over 18 working with the 16+ team are also in higher education. Other initiatives ensure guaranteed interview schemes, support to complete CVs, work experience at the city council and effective liaison with employers. There are excellent partnerships with local further education colleges and Newcastle Futures.
63. Care leavers live in suitable accommodation. Young people who met with inspectors reported that they like their accommodation and are happy where they live and were able to get help from a range of agencies for issues such as house keeping or finance. Training in independent living is provided according to needs. All unaccompanied asylum seekers are supported by Connexions to participate in training or further education and the Connexions personal adviser plays a strong role in advocating for their best interests.

Quality of provision

Grade 2 (Good)

64. The quality of provision for children and young people in Newcastle is good. In the cases seen by inspectors, there were no delays in placing children, with timely and good quality assessments of relatives as potential

carers having been undertaken. For children with disabilities appropriate and specialist placements are secured on the basis of identified need. Appropriate, well embedded expectations of community fostering and the use of family group conferencing are undertaken prior to accommodation being agreed. Although there is some evidence of highly effective practice, the progression of care plans is not sufficiently evident or timely. Assertive social work and appropriate decision making based on good quality analysis progresses early and effective action to secure the protection and well-being of children through court proceedings and adoption.

65. Assessments are satisfactory overall, with a good understanding of most needs of individual children being provided. However, the views of children and their parents and carers are not always evident in assessments and some do not take full account of emerging patterns in a child's life such as the use of alcohol or levels of sexual activity. Analysis of risks, needs and strengths is of an at least satisfactory quality and the better assessments draw sensitive, yet vivid pictures of children. Consideration of sibling relationships is not always fully evident in case files until the point where there is consideration being given to placing them apart. Where children have needs arising from a disability these have been consistently well considered. Children are routinely seen during the completion of assessments. Viability assessments are of a very good quality and explicitly address the risks and strengths of potential carers.
66. The needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people are fully assessed by specially trained social workers, who use easily accessible interpreters to ensure the child's views are effectively heard. However, practice with children and young people from minority communities as a whole is variable and, at times, is not of a sufficient depth to fully take account of the impact of their individual backgrounds. Some voluntary agencies are specifically contracted and those seen offer a good range of services to families from minority communities with children on the edge of care.
67. All cases inspected had up to date care plans that are of an at least satisfactory quality, and most are well implemented. In some cases the recording of care team meeting minutes was insufficiently detailed in how the plan was being effectively driven forward. Plans are reviewed regularly and in a timely manner, although in most cases seen the Independent Reviewing Officer had not offered to meet with the child prior to their review. In many cases reviews do not give a sense of what the child is really like and some recommendations are insufficiently linked to clear outcomes. Action plans to progress a plan are broad and insufficiently specific in some cases. There is good placement stability both in the short and long term, with little evidence of unplanned changes of placement. Permanency plans for children, once in place, are progressed assertively with no evidence of drift seen.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

68. Ambition and prioritisation for looked after children and young people are good. Ambitious and realistic targets are set in relation to all outcome areas for looked after children. For example, current targets are set to increase the number of supported lodgings providers, implement a range of tools to support transition to independence and to stretch the reach of the virtual school to include young people over 16 years. The Youth Offending Team have sustained good performance in relation to diverting looked after children from the criminal justice system. An ambitious commissioning plan aims to secure wide ranging cost savings. A regional consortium aiming to commission residential provision, enhancing consistency of contracting across children's social care and related health trusts, is on track for implementation during 2012.
69. Senior children's services managers effectively identify weaknesses, risks and priorities, keeping chief officers and elected members well informed during a period of substantial change and challenge. Priorities are appropriate and include ensuring effective governance arrangements are in place for services, and particularly in raising awareness and ensuring challenge with key partner agencies. The MALAP provides effective multi-agency strategic leadership as well as ensuring the needs of looked after children are increasingly effectively addressed through the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee, the NSCB and the Children's Trust Board. The ambitious, yet realistic, forward plan has measurable actions that are regularly and robustly reviewed. Progress toward meeting the priorities of reducing numbers looked after, placement costs and protecting children on the edge of care are well evidenced and considered by the programme board which drives the work plan within the context of learning from best practice.
70. Those elected members with responsibilities for corporate parenting exhibit clear commitment to, and championing of, the welfare and aspirations of looked after children. Meeting regularly, the group listens directly to 'Voices for Choices', the small but highly effective Children in Care Council. Officers are effectively challenged about performance and the views of children and young people are taken seriously. Raising awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities amongst all elected members is a priority for this group.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

71. The leadership and management of services for looked after children and young people in Newcastle are good. Improved understanding and a firm approach to tackling the rising looked after population has resulted in a very early small reduction in numbers. An open and committed approach to addressing the complex issues involved is demonstrated, as well as an increased effectiveness in the use of resources. Commissioning intentions

are set out in a comprehensive strategy addressing sufficiency planning, placement costs and constructive engagement with a range of partners. Commissioning practice is good and recent rapid and effective progress has been made in the implementation of improved and cost effective contracting and procurement. All looked after commissioning is informed by the views of children and young people.

72. Senior managers have a thorough knowledge of the profile of the looked after population. A placement panel frequently considers all admissions in detail, scrutinising each case to prevent drift. For children on the edge of care, greater consistency of practice and the application of thresholds have been supported through the provision of detailed information from local children's centres to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee. The rigorous review of commissioned prevention and early intervention services has resulted in commissioning that is firmly linked to the identified priorities. All contracts now have robust performance monitoring requirements.
73. Workforce strategies have resulted in the sustained recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of permanent social workers in all social care service teams. Vacancy levels are minimal, as is the use of agency temporary staff, and allocation of cases is well managed, enabling practitioners to still feel valued. However, senior managers acknowledge that their workforce remains unrepresentative of the wider community it serves, notably in terms of gender and ethnicity.
74. Most service users are satisfied with the service received and parents of looked after children reported that their children are well cared for. Almost all children who responded to a survey during the inspection stated that sufficient attention was paid to their views and feelings in their placements. Complaints by children are subject to effective scrutiny by the managers who take forward service development issues identified. All looked after children who make a complaint are contacted by the National Youth Advocacy Service and offered advice and support to make a complaint through the process. Allegations against staff are managed promptly and appropriately through effective local authority designated officer (LADO) arrangements.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 2 (Good)

75. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are good. Systems are well established across key partner agencies and effective use is made of internal evaluation and external challenge. The 'golden thread' of performance management from the strategic level to front line practice is clearly evident through the MALAP, placement panel, service management teams and within supervision of practitioners. Management oversight is routine, appropriate and evident on all case files inspected.

Front line and senior managers are accessible and the latter are often directly involved in complex cases. Staff report receiving regular, supportive and challenging supervision linked with their professional development.

76. Sustained good performance of looked after services is demonstrated in key indicators such as low rates of first time offending, education achievement, adoption and placement stability which are at least in line with and often better than similar authorities. Some educational targets have been exceeded and young people achieve better than predicted against their starting point. The placement panel monitors patterns and trends, reviews independent agency placements, particularly those in residential care, and considers capacity and commissioning issues. This plays an important role in addressing a key council priority of a safe reduction in the numbers of children being looked after.

Record of main findings:

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