

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Bolton

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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 61 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 88 case files for children and young people with a range of needs. 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 published in August 2011
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from Bolton NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Bolton 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. Bolton has a resident population of approximately 62,600 children and young people aged under 18, representing 23% of the total population of the area. In 2011, 28.2% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 22.5% in England overall. Some 21.8% of pupils speak English as an additional language. One hundred different first languages are spoken by children in Bolton, the most common being Gujarati (7.9%), Urdu (4.5%), Punjabi (2.8%), Somali (0.8%) and Polish (0.5%).
5. Deprivation in Bolton is higher than the national average, 22% of Bolton's Super Output areas are amongst the 10% most deprived in England. As of December 2011, Bolton has a Job Seekers Allowance claimant count rate of 4.9%, compared to 3.9% nationally.
6. Bolton has 132 schools comprising of 95 primary schools, 22 secondary schools (five private), seven special schools (one non-maintained) and eight pupil referral units (PRUs). Early years service provision is delivered predominantly through the private sector in over 165 settings; there are four local authority maintained nurseries.
7. Bolton's Children's Trust was initially set up in 2007 and re-constituted in 2010. The Trust includes representatives of Bolton Council and Bolton PCT services. Other representatives include acute services, probation, the voluntary and community sector, Job Centre Plus and representatives of all local schools and colleges. The Bolton Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) became independently chaired in 2010 bringing together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the area that provide safeguarding services. Currently 231 carer households foster for Bolton.
8. Council social care services manage a total of six children's homes, including two short term breaks facilities for children with disabilities, and an adolescent support unit. Community-based children's services are provided by three referral and assessment teams, three safeguarding teams and three looked after children's teams, supported by three teams for family support (which manage 18 children's centres between them) and borough wide teams for children with a disability, youth offending, adoption, fostering, sexual exploitation, young people's substance misuse and young people leaving care. There is an emergency out of hours service providing cover across the borough. Other family support services are delivered through extended services in schools. Some services are provided or coordinated through other parts of the children's services department such as the 5-19 services and early intervention services.
9. At the time of the inspection there were 520 looked after children. They comprise 175 children less than five years of age, 318 children of school

age (5–16), 27 post-16 young people and there are a total of 210 with care leaver status. Bolton uses a virtual school approach in its support of the learning of looked after children. At the time of the inspection there were 266 children who were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a decrease from 367 in March 2010. These comprise 121 females and 155 males (two were unborn children). Some 43% of these children are aged under five, 39% are 5 to 11 and 18% are 12 years or older. The categories of child protection plans were neglect at 44% and emotional abuse at 36%, physical abuse at 13% and sexual abuse at 7%.

10. Commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care are carried out by Bolton NHS PCT now part of the Greater Manchester PCT Cluster. The main provider of acute hospital and community health care services is Bolton NHS Foundation Trust. Community-based child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are provided by Bolton NHS Foundation Trust. In-patient CAMHS is provided Bolton NHS Foundation Trust. The Bolton NHS PCT provides community health services. The Bolton Health Consortium has been established as the Clinical Commissioning Group for the area.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

11. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Bolton is good. Children's Trust partners demonstrate a clear commitment to children and young people. There is good evidence of strong, embedded partnership working across both the statutory and voluntary sectors. There are good links between all agencies and the BSCB ensuring oversight and scrutiny of work. Children's Trust partners share the Bolton Vision Strategy within which the Children and Young People's Plan is incorporated, thereby retaining a focus on vulnerable children. A strength of the Children's Trust board is its strategic overview linked to an understanding of frontline work.
12. Whilst overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is good, the quality of provision for safeguarding services in Bolton is adequate. There are some examples of good work with children and young people in Bolton. However there are some areas of practice, particularly in respect of the quality and consistency of assessments, recording of identity needs, provision of advocacy service for children who are the subject of child protection plans and effectiveness of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) that require further development.
13. The strength of partnership working is evident in a range of multi-agency forums which are responsive to local need and coordinate service planning at strategic and operational levels. Partners are well represented within the Children's Trust and the BSCB. The council ensured consultation

processes with the voluntary sector were undertaken when looking at recent budget reductions and efficiencies across the borough. This enabled the voluntary sector partners to respond effectively and align their services to meet needs and for the council to strengthen contracting arrangements to ensure that they are outcome focused and make the best use of resources.

14. The diverse profile of the community is well understood. Highly effective partnership working is demonstrated through the work of the Bolton Council of Mosques (BCoM), which embraces 22 mosques and 23 Maddrassars representing a community of 25,000 people. Safeguarding has been at the forefront of work undertaken by the BCoM, for example in developing safe recruitment process and Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks across the Maddrassars.
15. Professional networks are well established in Bolton, and there is very good interagency communication at all levels, stimulating the development of services which are flexible and responsive to local need. Purposeful work at strategic level to address local issues is evident in high profile campaigns to raise awareness of safeguarding, and messages regarding safe sleeping, and 'party hard/party safe' are well understood by service users and those who work with them. Excellent links between the police, children's services and voluntary organisations have reduced risks to children who are at risk of sexual exploitation and who go missing from home or from care.
16. A strong community safety partnership promotes a good shared approach to diverting young people from crime and is resulting in steadily decreasing numbers who enter the criminal justice system. Activities provided by The Bolton Lads and Girls Club and services from the adolescent support unit are helping young people build resilience and raise aspirations. Police officers provide direct support to schools and children's homes and are valued in their role as mentors for young people. Examples of highly effective work within the children's centres include a range of parenting skills workshops which are valued by parents and a toy library which helps them improve learning at home.
17. Consultation is used to shape and develop services. The 'Vision' conference held in December 2011 was used to consider the revised community strategy, capturing the opinions, thoughts and ideas of approximately 200 delegates about what can be done practically to help deliver outcomes. However, consultation is not yet fully embedded within frontline practice, such as capturing the views of children and young people.
18. Workforce planning across the Bolton partnership is good. It is based upon effective analyses of need linking strategically to the vision of the partnership. Despite reductions in government funding the authority is

supporting training to enable staff working with vulnerable children to have appropriate access to training opportunities so as to enhance their practice. The range of training and support for the development of the social workers in Bolton is provided through the newly qualified social worker training programmes and post qualifying training. Bolton has a rolling programme of secondments for unqualified staff from within children's services to undertake the social work degree and has a trainee social worker scheme. Bolton is also committed to providing opportunities for graduates to undertake Step Up to Social Work training and three candidates are currently completing their assessed and supported year in employment. In recent years there has been a relatively low rate of turnover in social work posts. There has been little difficulty in recruiting to social work posts and the low number of vacancies that have arisen have usually been filled by advertisements, the secondment programme or by students who have undertaken placements in Bolton social work teams.

19. An effective complaints procedure is in place. Processes are well managed and complaints monitored to ensure that the council learns from the findings. Learning from complaints is disseminated by senior managers to social work teams to inform practice. Most complaints are resolved at an early stage. Children and young people, where needed, are well supported through the complaints process by advocacy arrangements. There is a commitment to achieve a positive outcome for the complainant and where possible to deal promptly with issues of concern.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

20. The capacity for improvement in safeguarding services is good. The council have a clear vision to deliver and sustain improvement. It is responding well to the changing economic climate and the Bolton 'Vision' demonstrates effective and responsive ways of working to ensure that priorities are met. The priorities for children's services incorporated within the Bolton 'Vision' are well understood across the council and partnerships. There is a good track record of improvement and a focus on the issues that are relevant in safeguarding children and young people.
21. The council's decision, in 2009, to establish the district team model gives children, young people and their families good access to a good range of comprehensive services within each of the three districts, including a referral and assessment team; a safeguarding team; and a looked after children team. The district model is being linked further to school clusters, children's centres and other family support services as well as becoming increasingly integrated with the work of partner agencies, to focus on early identification, family support, and safeguarding work.
22. Political priorities for vulnerable children are set out clearly within the council's priorities and savings strategy. Despite the wider council budget cuts there is a clear commitment to invest in children and young people's

services. Examples of this are the council's investment in a new social care recording system, the implementation of the district model resulting in additional social work posts, and the investment in adoption team staffing in response to a focus on early permanency planning.

23. Senior health managers are effectively engaged in the work of the BSCB, its sub-groups and the Children's Trust. Designated and named safeguarding staff provide strong leadership and positively contribute to quality assurance and governance arrangements within their own organisations and wider health and council partnerships. Their capacity overall is adequate and interim planning and risk management is progressing well to support the newly established Bolton Health Consortium and Greater Manchester PCT Cluster arrangements. Although some uncertainties are evident given the current stage of transition to local clinical commissioning arrangements, strong relationships are being forged with the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board. Safeguarding children is high on the agenda of the local Health Consortium with a lead executive role identified. Additional safeguarding capacity has been developed in recognition of the increased maternity and paediatric provision secured through the 'Making it Better' programme.
24. Funds released to local authority areas to support the implementation of the Munro Review are being used effectively by the BSCB. This includes a review the Framework for Action threshold document, assessing its impact on outcomes for children and young people and work with partners in Greater Manchester to produce a quality assurance model to assess the effectiveness of local safeguarding work.
25. Partnership working in Bolton is based on strong and embedded links between agencies and is effectively improving outcomes for children and young people. For example; the BSCB works to improve and sustain safeguarding outcomes through multi-agency training support and campaigns such as 'Sleep Safe'; there is effective partnership working to safeguard missing children; joint work and implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) and the co-location of health visitors within children's centres, providing effective early intervention and support to families.
26. Arrangements for performance management and quality assurance are integrated well into the work of the council at all levels. Messages from performance data on safeguarding are used by managers at all levels to drive the improvement of service delivery. Performance data is provided on a weekly basis to the Children's Champion and executive member for children, this ensures that staff and leaders have a clear understanding of where improvements are required. These arrangements are clearly linked to the continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people such as educational attainment and in improving the percentage of initial assessments completed within specified timescales. However, some

of the quality assurance audits seen did not sufficiently consider the quality of work being undertaken by staff to ensure that assessment work and planning is sufficiently detailed or specific.

27. Education services make a good contribution to safeguarding children and young people. Safeguarding is a high priority in schools and educational establishments. The high level of commitment to promoting well-being, countering bullying and establishing a safe learning environment makes a strong contribution to pupils' academic achievement. Partnership working between schools is well established and a key strength in keeping children safe. The 'Bolton Family' is a concept that has the full commitment of schools and is built on trust between all professionals.

Areas for improvement

28. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Bolton, the council and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should ensure that health records explore the impact of children's faith, culture and ethnic identity on safeguarding arrangements
- ensure that the identity needs of children and young people are fully recorded within assessments and plans.

Within three months:

- ensure that conference reports and minutes of meetings are distributed promptly
- ensure that GPs routinely submit reports to child protection conferences
- Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should ensure that health visitors improve the coverage of health checks for two-year-olds
- Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should improve systems for providing alerts of children on child protection plans attending accident and emergency (A&E) from neighbouring council areas
- ensure the understanding of the role of the local authority designated officer (LADO) across all staff teams
- improve the quality of child protection plans to ensure that they focus on what needs to change to enable families to care safely for children

- improve the quality of case file auditing to support performance management.

Within six months:

- Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should identify and engage young people who repeatedly attend A&E and those who become involved in anti-social activity whilst intoxicated
- provide an independent advocacy service for children who are the subject of child protection enquiries
- ensure that the child's perspective and voice are captured in reports to child protection conferences, core group meetings and reviews of child protection plans and ensure that young people can attend and contribute to these meetings
- develop the integrated children's services (ICS) system to ensure that it can capture all relevant information
- review the service provided by the IROs to ensure that caseloads are manageable and that they are able to focus on improving the quality of care planning and services for children.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 2 (Good)

29. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are good. Bolton's 'Framework for Action' is comprehensive and clearly sets out action to take if professionals from partner agencies suspect abuse or neglect and provides guidance on thresholds and how to make a referral to social care services. A development from the recent peer review was the 'Is this Significant Harm?' toolkit which further clarifies what practitioners should consider and how to make an appropriate referral. When statutory intervention is needed to safeguard a child the referral process is well managed and the response is well coordinated. In most of the cases reviewed by inspectors, children and young people had been appropriately safeguarded through timely and effective interventions by skilled and experienced staff. The children with disabilities team provides a responsive service which includes joint working with specialist workers to safeguard children.
30. The council have reviewed their approach to risk and are addressing issues raised in the peer review undertaken in October 2011 such as the high number of referrals and high numbers of children on child protection plans.
31. The management of allegations against people who work with children is improving. Clear procedures for referral to the LADO are available on the safeguarding website. Awareness of the role of the LADO has been raised through training and has resulted in rising numbers of referrals including those from the voluntary and independent sectors. Most staff interviewed from children's services and partner agencies were aware of the role of the LADO. There is also good engagement with health in addressing the behaviour of staff using the LADO process. However, not all children's services teams are fully aware of the role. There was positive feedback regarding the quality and speed of response to individual cases and LADO case files reviewed confirmed that cases pursued effectively and strategy meetings are clearly minuted. Themes identified from referrals to the LADO have been addressed through focused work, for example strengthening links with mosques and Madrassars.
32. An effective complaints procedure is in place. Staff readily provide information on complaints procedures to children and families ensuring a good professional focus on specific issues. Feedback from complaints is routinely used to inform changes to practice such as involving parents more effectively in child protection planning and conducting core group

meetings at families' homes wherever possible, rather than at schools which may be seen as too public by some parents

33. Recently redesigned feedback forms for children and families are routinely used. These are resulting in improving quality and volume of response, and inform both supervision sessions for individual practitioners and wider review of the way services are delivered. Examples of change as a result of user feedback included consultation with children and families over their preferred venue for core groups and child action meetings. Managers are aware that they receive more compliments than complaints, and are working to ensure that the voices of more service users are heard to inform service development.
34. There are very effective safe recruitment procedures in place across the children's workforce. Safe recruitment training is provided to staff and managers involved in recruitment processes. The single central record system for schools has been adopted within all staff personnel files and this assists in ensuring that safe practice is followed. There is good practice in renewing Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on a three year cycle. Robust action is being taken whereby personnel files for children's services staff are systematically being audited and any historical gaps in employment or education are being addressed.
35. The emergency duty team provides an appropriate service for children and adults enabling clear communication with day time duty teams. Staff are well supported, have access to electronic case files and have developed strong links with partner agencies ensuring quick and effective action is taken to safeguard children out of hours.
36. Focused work to review risk to children who have been on a child protection plan for over two years is resulting in a steady increase in those who are now supported through multi-agency child action plans. Social workers remain the lead professional for these children as long as is required.
37. There are good arrangements in place for young carers in Bolton The service is provided by Barnardo's and is targeted to focus on reducing inappropriate caring. CAF is used to assess the family circumstances and to provide a range of services to support young carers and their families. The plans are based on a clear risk assessment of needs and where necessary advocacy is provided for the young carers.
38. Education services make a good contribution to safeguarding children and young people. This is reflected in recent inspection reports where the majority of schools have been judged good or better for safeguarding. One primary school is currently in an Ofsted category of concern and safeguarding was identified as a concern. The council is taking appropriate action to secure leadership in the school and has addressed all outstanding safeguarding issues. Ofsted 'Best Practice' survey identified

excellent safeguarding in one school in Bolton. Three of the PRUs have been judged outstanding for safeguarding and provide excellent support for vulnerable young people. All special schools have been judged good or outstanding for safeguarding. Young people report that they feel very safe in school but not always when they are out, particularly at night. They say crime is prevalent in some areas.

39. Educational outcomes for children with disabilities and those with special educational needs are good. There is a range of educational provision for children with disabilities and those with special educational needs giving parents and carers a wide choice. Young people with disabilities receive good support in schools, further education and into employment through 'Project Search'. Effective partnership working between Firwood Special School, the council and Remploy supported employment provider supports young people in developing work based skills. CAMHS and Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) services work well in partnership with schools to provide services to those in most need. Support is offered on the school site for families who have difficulties accessing services.
40. Headteachers and teachers have a good understanding of referral routes and thresholds for child protection. Participants reported that they receive rapid, appropriate response from social care if they register a concern. They are aware of alternative routes if thresholds are not met. In addition, training and support for designated safeguarding teachers is good.
41. There are good strategies in place to support pupils at risk of exclusion and to support those who have been excluded in re-engaging with education. All secondary schools, special schools and PRUs have signed up to the 'Keeping on Track' protocols which ensure pupils receive appropriate educational places and support via managed moves. Primary schools are not currently signed up to these protocols although there are plans to do so. Fixed term exclusions have steadily decreased over the last four years and are now below average.
42. Behaviour Support services provide a range of interventions, which effectively support young people with behavioural difficulties. The positive impact of this work is reflected in the reduction in the reported incidence of bullying. The council carefully monitors incidents of racial or homophobic bullying and follow up with support including training for schools and preventive work with individual pupils and groups. Training also includes a focus on e-safety and dealing with cyber bullying. It is tailored to the needs of the school and pupils.
43. Good multi-agency collaboration, (including drug and alcohol support, specialist nurse, family support and Connexions advisers), supports young people to remain engaged with education and promotes positive educational outcomes. There are thorough procedures to safeguard

children who do not attend school. Elective home educated students are visited within six weeks and then as often as needs dictate.

44. Achievement has risen at all key stages for pupils overall and the gaps between vulnerable pupils and all pupils are relatively narrow. At Key Stage 2 achievement has risen over the last four years and was above the national average in 2011. The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ GCSE grades A*- C including English and mathematics has risen from below average to above average.
45. All children's homes were judged overall to be good or better at their last inspection. Fostering and adoption inspections undertaken in 2009 judged the council services to be good. The last inspection of private fostering arrangements undertaken in 2005 judged the service to be good.
46. Young people seen by inspectors were confident that their views were heard and taken seriously by the adults who worked with them and that they had been fully involved in plans to help them keep safe and do their best. One young woman interviewed said her worker had 'learned her life' by listening well, remembering what had been said, and using this, with her, to develop her care plan.
47. Social workers seen by inspectors are skilled and confident in enabling children to express their views. Inspectors saw examples of practice tools which had been used well to capture the perspective of younger children – for example the conference pack for children who are the subject of child protection enquiries and the newly developed feedback form following safeguarding intervention. Children with disabilities and adolescents are enabled to express their view using appropriate resources.
48. Partnership working is a strength in Bolton. There is a substantial track record of joint work to identify and respond to children who give rise to concern, and a shared determination to prevent, where possible, the need for formal intervention. A wide range of accessible and culturally sensitive resources means they are well used and contribute to measurably improved outcomes for children, for example the EXIT team for children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, the Remember You Are Not Alone (RUNA) project for runaways and the Freedom programme for victims of domestic violence.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

49. The quality of provision is adequate. There are some examples of good work with children and young people in Bolton. However there are some areas of practice and service provision that require further development. Early intervention is a priority in Bolton. Partner agencies have a clear understanding of each others' resources and work creatively to meet local need. Links with the voluntary sector are strong and generate a range of flexible services. Parents who had been victims of domestic violence spoke

very positively about how their learning from the Freedom programme was helping them build resilience and keep their children safe. They valued the practical and emotional help provided by the women's refuge, individual support from Safe Haven and 'Paws for Kids', which provides foster placements for animals when families need to leave home due to domestic violence. There is a good shared awareness of strategies to develop families' strengths at different levels of need, and a commitment to best practice in developing Child Action Meetings, Family Group Conferences, and Family Plans.

50. The adolescent support unit provides effective, targeted support for children and young people aged 10-16. It offers outreach and in reach work as well as residential care at weekends to prevent the breakdown of the family unit, and reduces the number of children admitted to long term care by providing support to families. Children and young people using the service have individual mentors. Children said that going to the unit has helped them to cope better at home and in school. The work done there has helped young people to develop skills in dealing with their behaviour and has given them opportunities to learn in a relaxed and nurturing environment. The children said that they feel safe there.
51. The common assessment framework (CAF) champions group provides strong leadership and training in the use and development of this model. While practitioners were confident that CAF assessments led to positive actions for families, evidence of outcomes and parents and children's feedback on their experience, is not routinely collected or collated and this limits agencies' ability to learn from service users about 'what works'.
52. Good arrangements are in place to identify, recover and work with young people who go missing from home, school or care. Safe and well checks are conducted by the Police and where needed young people are referred to accessible specialist services with good levels of local knowledge and expertise, EXIT, a team for children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and the RUNA project for runaways.
53. The youth offending service and targeted youth support programmes offer flexible work programmes which are successfully helping to divert young people from criminal activity. The Bolton Lads and Girls Club and Raise the Youth project provide a range of activities. Comments from young people and carers confirmed that these services help to strengthen social skills, broaden horizons and raise aspirations. Specialist and innovative work is being undertaken within Bolton to effectively meet the diverse needs of young people through speech therapy. A speech therapist is paid by Bolton NHS foundation trust to work with the local youth offending team to identify and treat speech and language defects in young offenders to help prevent them from re-offending. On the strength of this work, the team has been awarded £75,000 by the Department of Health to focus for

a year on assessing the communication problems of first-time offenders and to identify effective language interventions.

54. The 360 service to support young people and their families where there are substance misuse issues is co-located with the early intervention education team and the leaving care team. The 360 service has been resourceful in response to budgetary reductions and is providing an increasingly targeted service for young people and families at risk of exclusion. The service has good links with adult mental health services and receives support from doctors and nursing staff with specialist skills in substance misuse. The location of the team alongside the early intervention education team ensures a targeted response where alcohol and cannabis misuse is seen as a significant contributory factor when children and young people are at risk of exclusion.
55. Parents seen at children's centres were keen to explain how they and their children have been enabled to widen social networks & develop confidence and skills. Two members of the group are now voluntarily running a 'Happy parents, happy children' group, using dance and song. Parents with English as a second language said this had helped develop their language, make friends and be better parents. All, including those who had had contact with social care, said they had been treated with respect and received services which were appropriate and timely. Young mothers seen at the PRU were on course to achieve their goals.
56. Cases requiring initial assessment by social care are allocated promptly to qualified and experienced social workers who are well managed. Thresholds are appropriate and generally well understood by other agencies. Children and young people in need of protection are prioritised and their immediate needs are assessed well by suitably qualified, experienced and skilled social workers.
57. The timeliness of assessments is good with 89% of core assessments being completed within timescales in the third quarter of 2011-2012. This is a better performance than that of statistical neighbours at 77% over the same period. Initial assessments are also timely and demonstrate good and continuing improvement in performance, with 87.6% completed within 10 days in 2010-2011 and 90% in the third quarter of 2011-2012. Again, this is higher than that of statistical neighbours at 76% for 2010-2011.
58. Initial and core assessments reflected a sound understanding of the needs of the child. Partner agencies, notably health and school staff, are effectively involved in contributing to assessments and child protection conferences. Files seen demonstrated that there had been effective liaison with probation leading to information sharing at Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings resulting in improved shared awareness of risks posed to children by adults' behaviour.

59. The council has taken positive steps to improve the quality and consistency of assessment at all levels of need, has revised practice standards and is involving staff from all agencies in a comprehensive training programme to ensure that all meet the highest standards. Initial and core assessments seen during the inspection were generally of good quality, and reflected appropriate focus on risk and protective factors for children. There is some good evidence on files of routine supervision of cases being undertaken. However, the quality of assessment work is too variable with insufficient or no detail recorded in some aspects. Identity is not always recorded sufficiently and the individual needs of children are not always sufficiently identified where there is a sibling group. Staff are vigilant in researching the cultural background of families and securing appropriate services to promote their full involvement in assessment and care plans. Translation and interpreting services are accessible and parents who had used these services told inspectors that they had been treated with respect.
60. Children are routinely seen as part of the assessment process. Initial and core assessments evidenced some skilled work with younger children to evaluate the quality of their relationships with carers and siblings, and there were some examples of older children's views and feelings informing robust assessment of risk and need. However, the child's perspective and voice was not consistently captured in reports to child protection, core group meetings and reviews of child protection plans, and inspectors did not see any evidence that young people attended or contributed to these meetings. There is currently no independent advocacy service for children who are the subject of child protection enquiries. This means that their views are not independently represented at meetings and case conferences.
61. Robust management oversight ensures that where Section 47 strategy discussions are undertaken these are held promptly with decisions and appropriate safeguarding actions clearly evidenced. Strategy meetings had been held promptly in cases tracked by inspectors. They were child focused, appropriately included partner agencies and resulted in clear joint plans. Although children and young people are seen routinely as part of the investigation it is not always clear from the ICS record whether they had been seen on their own.
62. Reports to court in care proceedings include the 'combined comprehensive social work and parenting assessment', a Bolton-designed format which effectively keeps the child at the heart of the assessment and includes careful consideration of risks and protective factors. While a well-worked exemplar was seen by inspectors this document is not currently part of the child's electronic file.
63. The quality of case file recording seen is too variable. However, there are examples of good practice in relation to detailed chronologies, case notes,

analyses and assessments completed within timescales. Minutes of child protection conferences and core group meetings showed good levels of attendance and contributions from professionals and partner agencies. However, the resulting actions did not consistently clarify the responsibilities of these agencies in working with families to progress child protection plans. Child protection plans seen were not sufficiently focused on what needed to change to enable families to care safely for children, how and when progress would be evaluated and steps that would be considered should the required changes not be achieved. While social workers confirmed that they speak with families and children to ensure they are clear about plans this was not reflected in recording and some parents who met inspectors said that, at times, they had been unclear what was expected of them. The authority is tackling this issue through multi-agency training including how social workers can make best use of practice tools.

64. The recently introduced ICS system has been welcomed and is proving more effective in ensuring case recording and assessments are consistent and up to date, with management oversight clearly recorded. It has been particularly welcomed by the emergency duty team. Chronologies are being generated by the new ICS system. However the current system does not ensure that significant events in children's lives are highlighted and used to inform case planning and reviews. Good quality age appropriate feedback forms for children are used well following interventions to elicit children's wishes and feelings. However these documents cannot yet be uploaded on to the ICS system.
65. IRO caseloads are too high and workloads too varied to enable adequate focus on improving care planning and the quality of services. IROs are committed to their role, determined to improve the quality of their practice and aware of the further work needed to meet local and national expectations. They have begun work to promote young people's involvement in their reviews, for example by chairing their own meetings; however this is at an early stage of development. Case records seen by inspectors do not demonstrate effective challenge by IROs of child protection plan objectives to promote improved outcomes for children and young people.

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

66. The contribution of health agencies in Bolton to keeping children and young people safe is good. Leadership provided by designated and named safeguarding staff and senior managers supports a strong learning culture. Frontline health staff have a thorough understanding of their roles and statutory responsibilities, are active in raising concerns and in work to address risks to the safety and well-being of children and young people. Midwives, health visitors and school nurses give high priority to

safeguarding children, are effectively engaged in child protection and child action meetings, and are supportive of work undertaken by partner agencies to improve outcomes for local children. Safeguarding arrangements for children with disabilities and young people who self-harm are well developed.

67. Most health care records seen were of a good standard. Health chronologies are embedded in practice and together with contact records and conference reports provide a clear overview of children's health needs and analysis of protective factors and risks. However, although inspectors observed many examples of culturally sensitive work with children and their families, child health records do not sufficiently explore the impact of children's faith, culture and ethnic identity on safeguarding arrangements. The engagement of GPs in child protection work is steadily growing. Almost all GP practices now have an identified safeguarding lead, but GPs do not routinely submit reports to child protection conferences. There are delays in health professionals receiving conference reports and minutes of meetings.
68. The quality of safeguarding practice is secured by comprehensive supervision arrangements and a large number of front line managers have received appropriate training. Safeguarding training is strongly promoted across all health organisations, and health providers comply with the requirement that at least 80 % of staff have accessed appropriate training. Good attention is given to safe staff recruitment and robust procedures are in place to ensure professional standards of recruitment practice are achieved. Responsibilities for safeguarding children are clearly outlined in contract specifications and reviews, and work is progressing to strengthen accountabilities where work is sub contracted to local organisations. Workforce management of safeguarding work is well managed and although school nurses and health visitors have high caseloads, strong teamwork and management support means that priority safeguarding work is effectively delivered. Workforce planning is well developed and plans to increase the number of health visitors is likely to result in the further development of joint working arrangements to protect children.
69. The health needs of some of Bolton's children and young people are high compared to other areas. There is mixed success in the extent to which improved health outcomes are evident. Whilst there has been significant recent improvement in the reduction of teenage conceptions and smoking cessation rates, and steady increases in breast feeding the rates of infant mortality and young people presenting to A&E remain high. Senior managers across the partnership are actively engaged in work to address health inequalities and recent developments such as the 'Sleep Safe' campaign have embedded a strong shared focus on identifying and managing risk to babies. The 'Party Hard, Party Safe' campaign aims to strengthen young peoples' awareness of risks from misusing alcohol and

drugs. Young people who repeatedly attend A&E or become involved in anti-social activity whilst intoxicated are not adequately identified.

70. Health partners communicate effectively with children, young people and their carers to ensure their views and experience are taken into account in the way the service is provided. High priority is given to monitoring the health and well-being of adolescents, and young people are actively engaged in their health assessments and support plans. This approach promotes effective screening of the health needs of young people and has strengthened targeting of health promotion work and the availability of contraceptive advice and support. Consent and confidentiality is sensitively managed to enable young people to understand and make informed decisions about their health and well-being. The reach of the Parallel Health Centre is extensive in terms of numbers of young people and range of services delivered. Joint working between specialist health staff and other professionals working in multi-agency teams ensures a robust and comprehensive approach to supporting young people with complex health and behavioural needs. Support for teenage mothers is good and the recent establishment of the Family Nurse Partnership provides additional capacity in reaching vulnerable young women and their partners.
71. Work is progressing to enable the full delivery of the Healthy Child programme for children under the age of five years. Good work with early years provision, including children's centres and the child development centre, supports an effective shared focus on the health and development of young children with a diverse range of needs. Whilst health visitors have achieved good performance in coverage of eight-month-old baby checks, and high performance in immunisations, there are gaps in the coverage of health checks for two-year-olds.
72. The dedicated children's accident and emergency department at Bolton hospital benefits from good paediatric nurse cover, and additional capacity can be deployed for periods of high activity. There are appropriate 'flagging' arrangements to identify Bolton children who attend and are on child protection plans. However, systems for identifying children on child protection plans from neighbouring council areas are not as robust. Arrangements for the reporting of concerns to named and designated safeguarding leads are robust and communication with the Police and social care is effective. Arrangements for the medical examination of children where non accidental injury is suspected are managed well, with the work undertaken by suitably trained and experienced paediatricians. Allegations of sexual harm and assault to children and young people are effectively managed through a regional resource at St Mary's Hospital, Manchester. The tripartite Child Death Overview Panel works well with strong leadership by Bolton as the host agency. The Rapid Response team ensures prompt follow up of child deaths. Work has taken place to strengthen bereavement support to families.

Ambition and prioritisation**Grade 1 (Outstanding)**

73. Ambition and prioritisation are outstanding. There is effective leadership and a clear vision for children's services articulated through the Director of Children's Services with evidence of good links to elected members, the Chief Executive, Bolton Safeguarding Children Board, the Children's Trust and the wider partnerships across Bolton. Strategic planning is well defined within the Bolton Vision Strategy where the children and young people's strategy is clearly and separately identified. The priorities of the children's services are well understood across the council and partnership. There is a good track record of improvement and a focus on the issues that are relevant in safeguarding children and young people.
74. There is a strong commitment to protect children's services and ensure that there is continuity for vulnerable groups of children and young people. The council has set clear priorities for vulnerable children. Investment in a new social care recording system and the implementation of the district model requiring additional social work posts demonstrate the council's commitment to ensure front line services are equipped to keep children safe at a time of substantial budget cuts. Safeguarding outcomes for vulnerable children are consequently improving. Decisive work with new referrals is evident, there has been a measurable improvement in the timeliness of initial and core assessments, and focused work with children who are the subject of child protection plans means increasing numbers are being subject to care proceedings when it is appropriate, or are benefiting from active support in the community. No services are deteriorating.
75. At the end of 2009-2010 there were 367 children on a child protection plan in Bolton. The current number of children on a child protection plan is now 266, a significant drop in numbers as Bolton are taking robust action to address the appropriate use of child protection plans and ensure that thresholds are met.
76. The priorities of the children's services are very well understood across the council and partnership at all levels. There is a demonstrable track record of improvement and a focus on the issues that are relevant in safeguarding children and young people.
77. The Chief Executive shows highly effective leadership, commitment and understanding of the key priorities for safeguarding children and young people, especially in educational attainment, health and the need to focus on early intervention strategies.
78. There is strong political leadership with a determined focus on safeguarding vulnerable children. The leader of the council has a clear understanding of current issues and priorities within children's services embodied within the Bolton 'Vision'. He ensures a high level of scrutiny on outcomes for children and young people through regular reports and

briefings from children's services senior managers, through the scrutiny committees and from the executive member for children. His relationship with senior management in the council is based upon trust, challenge and scrutiny.

79. The strength of partnership working is evident in a range of multi-agency forums which are responsive to local need and coordinate service planning at strategic and operational levels. Partnerships between the voluntary and independent sector and the council are well established and highly effective. The council ensured consultation processes were undertaken when looking at budget reductions across the area. This enabled voluntary sector partners to respond effectively and align their services to meet needs. Contracting arrangements have been strengthened and are outcome focused to ensure best the use of resources.
80. Professional networks are well established in Bolton, and excellent inter-agency communication at all levels stimulates the development of services which are flexible and responsive to local need. Purposeful work at strategic level to address local issues is evident in high profile campaigns to raise awareness of safeguarding. Excellent links between the Police, the council and voluntary organisations have reduced risks to children who are at risk of sexual exploitation and who go missing from home or from care. A strong community safety partnership promotes a good shared approach to diverting young people from crime and is resulting in steadily decreasing numbers who enter the criminal justice system. Activities provided by the Bolton Lads and Girls Club and services from the adolescent support unit are helping young people build resilience and raise aspirations. Police officers provide direct support to schools and children's homes and are valued in their role as mentors for young people. Examples of highly effective work within the children's centres include a range of parenting skills workshops which are valued by parents who met inspectors and a toy library which helps them improve learning at home.
81. The council is highly effective in assessing need within changing communities. This is promoted effectively through strong partnership working between the council, community and faith groups, health services, Police, youth services and schools. Recent work to address the needs of an influx of Eastern European families and Somalian asylum seekers illustrates how this has been implemented. The promotion of equality and diversity is integrated into the Bolton's work at all levels and equality impact assessments are carried out at strategic level to ensure that the most vulnerable are not disadvantaged through the reorganisation of services or due to savings and efficiency changes. Full account is taken of alternative provision to ensure there are no gaps in services.
82. All managers have benefited from change management training delivered by an independent commissioned trainer and this has been highly valued

by those interviewed in enabling them to support staff through the considerable change process of amalgamating children's centre work with mainstream service delivery. This has resulted in continuity and consistency of work within the three new district area teams and is illustrated through high levels of staff morale and commitment. Staff expressed confidence in their managers in providing effective leadership at strategic and operational level. They had felt involved in and able to contribute to the recent review and reconfiguration of services and well supported in developing their new roles.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

83. Leadership and management are good. Good workforce planning has ensured that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced social workers to deliver an effective service. Staffing levels within the three district teams are high. Caseloads are manageable and the weighting system ensures that caseloads are also equitable. Additional resources have resulted in additional social work posts. Management capacity in each of the three referral and assessment teams was increased by making the half-time deputy team manager posts full time. The unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements by Ofsted in August 2011 also identified the strengths of the workforce in working with vulnerable children, the good levels of support provided to staff, low sickness rates and well motivated, stable and fully-staffed permanent workforce. This contributes to consistency of involvement with families and partner agencies to achieve good outcomes for children.
84. The priorities of the children's services are well understood across the council and partnership. There is a good track record of improvement and a focus on the issues that are relevant in safeguarding children and young people. Senior managers are visible and respected for their leadership skills and direct work to support staff through the recent review and re-configuration of early intervention and family support services.
85. Feedback from service users including young people, parents and professionals is routinely collected and used to review practice. Where improvements in practice can be realised appropriate action has been taken as a result of feedback provided. This has included social workers linking parents to a key professional for support or advice after child protection plans have ceased.
86. The council's budget strategy ensures that safeguarding vulnerable children remains a priority. The strategy is driven by ensuring economic prosperity and narrowing the gap, which includes safeguarding vulnerable children. The children's services base budget reduction is the lowest level reduction within the council's services. The realignment of children's services has also enabled the council to reinvest the savings that had been

made. The Staying Safe base budget has been protected with growth of 2.3 % from 2012-2013.

87. Effective commissioning and joint commissioning arrangements are in place to safeguard and protect children and young people. The key achievements of commissioning are demonstrated through partnership working and value for money. For example, the Barnardo's service for young carers and the effective joint commissioning for the placement of health visitors within children's centres to focus on early intervention. Partnership working between the third sector and the council is well established and highly effective. The third sector organisations working within Bolton developed the Children and Young People's Forum in 2010, through which the partner organisations provide mutual support. They are further facilitated by a strategic lead employed by the council who is able to provide support and advice on commissioning arrangements but also advise on submitting applications for grant funding applications. Forum members have well established and effective links to the Children's Trust, shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and the BSCB. The partnerships with the statutory sector are strong and based upon good relationships and highly effective communication.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 2 (Good)

88. Performance management and quality assurance are good. Good performance management arrangements are in place to support the effectiveness of the safeguarding service operation. Team managers appropriately use performance monitoring routinely with front line staff to focus on outcomes and the timeliness and quality of assessments and child protection plans. Managers are aware of the strengths and areas for development within their own areas of service delivery, such as the variable quality of assessment work, and have service action plans to address these. Staff receive regular structured supervision using a supervision model to develop improved practice, focusing on outcomes for children and young people. However the quality of case file auditing seen by inspectors was not always focused on outcomes or the quality of work to ensure that assessments and plans had sufficient detail to enable consistent and improved outcomes for children and young people.
89. Arrangements for performance management are integrated into the work of the council at all levels. Messages from performance data on safeguarding are considered at the staying safe management team meetings on a monthly basis. The messages are then cascaded down to the district team managers and to staff on an individual basis within their supervision meetings. Performance data is provided on a weekly basis to the Children's Champion and executive member for children. In addition the assistant director presents six monthly performance information to the full corporate parenting group of the council.

90. The integrated Bolton NHS Foundation Trust established in July 2011 is developing ways of using data to develop performance management across the new organisation and with the council. There is a clear understanding, at strategic and front line levels, of the priorities for safeguarding and looked after children. Action plans arising from the Ofsted unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment and from the recent peer review are used and monitored closely. The BSCB uses performance data to inform its key priorities across the partnership.
91. The council are committed to learning and improving the services to safeguard children in Bolton. Recommendations arising from the unannounced inspection have been implemented leading to an improved focus on recording the voice of the child during and after intervention. Steps have been taken to improve the quality of referrals from the domestic violence unit, and a robust screening process is in place to monitor their quality and content. The council has also developed a thorough action plan following the recent peer review.

Partnership working

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

92. Partnership work is outstanding and defines the Bolton 'family'. Professional trust, with outcomes for children placed firmly at the centre of agencies, is evident in excellent work across the partnership. The strength of partnership working is evident in a range of multi-agency forums which are responsive to local need and coordinate service planning at strategic and operational levels. Partnerships between the third sector and the council are well established and highly effective. The council ensured consultation processes were undertaken when looking at budget reductions across the area. This enabled the third sector partners to respond effectively and align their services to meet needs. Contracting arrangements have been strengthened and are outcome focused to ensure best use of resources. Health partners are effectively engaged in Bolton Council's strategic planning and improvement work including the Children's Trust, Health and Care Together and local children's and adults safeguarding boards.
93. The diverse profile of the community is well understood. Highly effective partnership working is demonstrated through the work of the Bolton Council of Mosques (BCoM) and across other faith groups within Bolton. There is strong commitment to community cohesion with highly effective communication networks across the community, council and Police focusing on safeguarding vulnerable children which ensured during recent national marches and rioting that local children were safe.,
94. A strong community safety partnership promotes a strong shared approach to diverting young people from crime and is resulting in steadily decreasing numbers who enter the criminal justice system. Activities provided by the Bolton Lads and Girls Club and services from the

adolescent support unit are helping young people build resilience and raise aspirations. Police officers provide direct support to schools and children's homes and are valued in their role as mentors for young people.

95. The work of the BSCB is supported through the effective partnership working arrangements across Bolton. The BSCB is sufficiently resourced with a clear budget up until 2013. However, the chair is keen to ensure the effective review of resources through a review of the work of sub-groups, the remit of the groups and ensuring a focus on outcomes for safeguarding. The BSCB have clearly defined priorities. Membership of the Board is representative of children's and young people's services, and is complemented by the inclusion of a lay member. There is multi-agency working and a high level of commitment from members.
96. Strong working relationships have been established with schools, and head teachers and school governors spoke positively of the working relationship with children's services. Head teachers spoke positively of their relationship with the council and how their Bolton Association of Secondary Heads (BASH) meetings have included the Director and Assistant Directors.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

97. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children in Bolton is good. There is effective leadership and a clear vision for children's services articulated through the Director of Children's Services, with evidence of good links to elected members, the Chief Executive, Bolton Safeguarding Children Board, the Children's Trust, health services and the wider partnerships across Bolton. Leadership is visible, highly respected and accessible.
98. Whilst overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is good, the quality of provision for looked after children in Bolton is adequate. There are some examples of effective work with children and young people in Bolton. However there are some areas of practice, such as the quality and consistency of assessments, recording of identity needs, and effectiveness of IROs, quality of recording of statutory visits and the contribution of children in their statutory reviews that require further development.
99. The council has set clear political priorities for vulnerable children within the Bolton economy. This is clearly set out in the council's priorities and savings strategy. Examples of this are the council's investment in a new social care recording system and the implementation of the district for social work teams which required additional investment for long term improved outcomes for children and young people. Children's services within Bolton have been subject to budget cuts but the council and its partners are working effectively to strengthen commissioning and outcomes and to look at innovative work focused on early intervention.
100. The council have a clear vision to deliver and sustain improvement. They are responding well to the changing economic climate and strategic plans demonstrate effective and responsive ways of working to ensure that priorities are met. The highest level plan for the Bolton Borough is the community strategy, 'Bolton Vision' within which the children and young people's plan's priorities are included. The council have delivered a range of significant achievements over the life of the strategy including improvements in educational attainment and reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour.
101. The new community strategy 2012-2015 will continue to focus on the two main aims of narrowing the gap and economic prosperity. The themes have been adjusted slightly to ensure the strategy focuses on the borough's priorities and, following representation from the Children's Trust, that children and young people need to have a higher profile in the strategy, Children and Young People is now a theme in its own right.

102. District managers have a clear focus on safeguarding looked after children and young people in Bolton. They have welcomed the changes to the management structure made three years ago to create separate safeguarding and looked after children teams. This allows for continuity of work and improved consistency of practice across teams with appropriately supported transitions for children and young people.
103. Foundations for strong and effective wider partnerships are established and developing in relation to the commissioning of services for looked after children. The 10 Greater Manchester local authorities have established a strong network, the Association for Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA), working across services and in partnership with a wide range of private, public and voluntary organisations.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

104. Capacity for improvement is good. There is an appropriately focused looked after children strategy which is well understood and disseminated to staff at all levels of the organisation. The current level of looked after children in Bolton is high. Strategies are in place to address this. However, current levels reflect a previously high threshold for admission to care that resulted in larger numbers of young people being admitted to care when they were older. This legacy continues to impact on the looked after population who are predominantly teenagers who are likely to remain in care until they reach 18. Numbers are now beginning to reduce as the looked after children strategy has impact. For example, there are now high levels of children subject to adoption placement orders and increased use of special guardianship orders ensure that early permanency planning is at the forefront of work.
105. The children's services scrutiny committee provides a good level of challenge and oversight of work with children and young people in Bolton. There is a consensus across all the political parties in Bolton that the needs of vulnerable children and adults are a priority. The identification of key issues for scrutiny is based on an understanding of current work and information provided quarterly on performance management against key indicators. Recent scrutiny has included services for looked after children.
106. The priorities of the children's services are well understood across the council and partnership. There is a good track record of improvement and a focus on the issues that are relevant in safeguarding children and young people. There is capacity within children's services to improve despite budget reductions because the right staff, systems and processes are in place. Improvements are continuing because there is a clear vision and commitment to vulnerable children.
107. The Chief Executive shows good leadership, commitment and understanding of the key priorities for improving outcomes for looked after children, especially in educational attainment. The Chief Executive

effectively monitors children's services using a range of performance data provided and through regular meetings with the senior management team. Through these mechanisms he has a clear understanding of both the relevant strategic and operational issues within children's services.

108. Bolton has a strong record on partnership working and has shown how this has successfully adapted over time. The 'Bolton Vision' steering group is key to the partnership and is ensuring that they are well prepared for the effects of health reforms and the establishment of the health and well-being board. A shadow health and well-being board has already been established and the partnerships are considering how they can work to ensure effective commissioning within this new framework.
109. The council has recently consulted with local strategic partners to review and refresh the Borough's community strategy in light of the current economic climate and changing circumstances. The five key areas they have identified for young people in Bolton are: keeping children safe, raising attainment, improving outcomes for looked after children, improving health outcomes and reducing child poverty. The strategy ensures that a good focus is kept on safeguarding vulnerable children.
110. Bolton has an effective corporate parenting group with cross party commitment and engagement. The council created an additional Executive Member position in 2009-10 with a portfolio covering safeguarding and looked after children, working alongside the Executive Member for children's services to improve the focus on outcomes for looked after children. Due to financial pressures, it was no longer possible to sustain two Executive Member roles in children's services consequently, in 2011-12, the role of looked after children's champion was created
111. Workforce planning and development is effective. The aims and objectives of the workforce strategy are ambitious with a clear aim to recruit and retain the workforce necessary to deliver the children and young people's plan. Staying Safe social work services were restructured during 2009-2010 in order to increase capacity and create specialist looked after children teams. Bolton have recently identified various different pressures their adoption system is facing, given the clear and appropriate focus on permanency, and have recruited additional social work staff and management to help cope with the pressure.
112. The council has responded effectively to the findings of the unannounced inspections of contact and referral arrangements published in May 2010 and August 2011, producing clear action plans. The council was also subject to a peer review whose findings were published in November 2011. An action plan from the review was developed and work is on going to address the findings.

Areas for improvement

113. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and young people in Bolton, the council and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure that the identity needs of children and young people are fully recorded within assessments and plans.

Within three months:

- improve the timescales for foster carers receiving medical consent forms
- ensure the understanding of the role of the LADO across all staff teams
- improve the quality of education plans for looked after children especially with regard to measurable target setting
- provide information and clarity to foster carers with regard to overnight stays, provision of laptops and allowances
- improve the quality and provision of pathway planning.

Within six months:

- review the provision of services for care leavers to ensure that outcomes for young people can be sustained and developed
- develop the use of the ICS system to ensure that it can be used effectively to gather required data, record pathway plans and ensure that all staff teams are confident in the use of the system
- continue to improve the quality of assessments and record keeping especially with regard to statutory visits
- review the role of the IROs to ensure that caseloads are manageable and that they are able to focus on improving care planning and the quality of services for children
- Bolton Council in conjunction with Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should take action to consider the emotional, mental health and long term conditions of the current looked after children population to inform joint commissioning priorities and evaluation of progress in tackling health inequalities

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- Bolton Council in conjunction with Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should take action to integrate learning from strengths and difficulties questionnaires into health assessments and support plans and ensuring care leavers are provided with a full health history on leaving care
 - Bolton Council in conjunction with Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should take action to capture feedback from young people of their experience of health assessments to inform service improvement and development
 - Bolton Council in conjunction with Bolton NHS Foundation Trust should take action to review the CAMHS strategy in response to the increases in the number of looked after children and the complexity of their needs.

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

Being healthy

Grade 2 (Good)

114. Arrangements to address the health of children and young people who are looked after are good. Health outcomes for most children and young people who are looked after have continued to improve and risks to their well-being are effectively monitored. Children benefit from universal, individually tailored, and when required, specialist or intensive support in having their physical, emotional and mental health needs met. The health needs of children who are looked after are included in the joint strategic needs assessment for the area. However, the assessment does not fully consider the historical impact of neglect, emotional harm and abuse on the health of looked after children or how this information can be used to prioritise joint commissioning or consider how well services are addressing health inequalities.
115. The designated doctor for looked after children is also the named doctor and there are occasions when her capacity is stretched in meeting the requirements of both roles. The new Foundation Trust is currently reviewing its capacity to ensure strategic and operational work is effectively discharged in the light of health restructuring and increase in numbers and complexity of the needs of children who are looked after or who are the subject of adoption placement orders. The looked after children operational group has reviewed its performance against NICE guidelines and is working to address gaps in local arrangements. Care leavers do not receive a full health history on leaving care because integrated learning from strengths and difficulties questionnaires is not included in their health assessments and support plans.
116. Information is routinely provided to young people and their carers to help them access health care and know who to contact. Pathways and team responsibilities for addressing the health needs of children who are looked after are clear, although foster carers report delays in their receiving medical consent forms.
117. There are appropriate arrangements in place to track the needs of children who move between different council areas. The workload management of school nurses and health visitors ensures priority is given to addressing the needs of children who are looked after. This has resulted in high performance in ensuring children's health reviews are undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements. The council is a top performer in the number of young people who have regular dental and optical checks and are up to date with immunisations. Children and young people are encouraged to say where they would like their health assessment to take place and to identify the things that matter to them.

However, feedback from young people of their experience of health assessments is not routinely captured to inform service improvement and development. School drop ins and the Parallel Health Centre ensure ease of access and monitoring of the needs of children who are looked after and those on the edge of care. Health promotion work features strongly in the help and support provided to young people.

118. Teenage pregnancy rates amongst young people who are looked after are low and support for young people and care leavers who become pregnant is good with young people benefiting from work undertaken by the outreach midwives and more recently the family nurses.
119. Audits of the quality of assessments and support plans highlighted the fact that some GPs were not meeting the required standard. Training and guidance has been provided by the designated doctor to raise standards of practice. Bolton NHS Foundation Trust staff supervision arrangements do not currently require discussion of the needs of children who are looked after, although in practice they are frequently discussed. The quality of work and outcomes could be further strengthened through formally embedding supervision arrangements for looked after children.
120. A comprehensive range of support is available to children with disabilities or complex health or behavioural needs to promote their safety and independence. Good joint working with foster carers, children's homes, school and social care staff supports early identification and timely response to addressing children's health needs, including those who are placed at home with their families. The looked after CAMHS provides good consultation and advice to social workers and foster carers to equip them with the knowledge and skills to support young people who have experienced a high level of trauma and loss in their lives. The impact of this work is seen in a number of areas including improved attendance at school, reduction in self harming or offending behaviour, and a strengthening of their placement arrangements. However, the CAMHS strategy is out of date and the CAMHS team has limited capacity to support young people placed out of area. Consequently, there can be delays in their receiving specialist help.

Staying safe

Grade 2 (Good)

121. Safeguarding arrangements for looked after children and young people are good. Robust assessment processes are well understood and mean that children enter and remain in care only when this is unavoidable or part of a plan. On occasion, short term admissions to care are used as part of well considered child protection plans, leading to carefully managed and successful rehabilitation with family members. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker. Thresholds into care and for those at immediate need of protection are well understood. No child was deemed unsafe in the cases seen on inspection.

122. Most looked after children are placed in 'in house' provision that is judged as good or better. Short break services for children with disabilities are judged by Ofsted as outstanding. The council fostering and adoption services were inspected in 2009 are judged good by Ofsted. Children and young people who spoke to inspectors report that they feel safe in their accommodation and in the areas where they live. They are provided with good levels of information to keep themselves safe. Higher than average numbers of children are placed with parents on care orders or interim care orders but cases seen by inspectors show that these are being safely managed.
123. The small number of children in external provision are placed in services that have been judged good or better by Ofsted. Where services fall below this standard there are effective arrangements for ensuring a prompt review. Contractual arrangements for placements benefit from membership of the North West consortium group of councils who regularly review placements to ensure that outcomes for children and young people are good. The Bolton resource management panel also carry out regular reviews and audits of service providers to ensure that children and young people are safe.
124. There is good performance on short and long term placement stability and this is sustained because of effective and proactive support. Risk assessments are consistently well completed prior to placements so informed matching decisions can be made and appropriate support provided. There are transition protocols in place with the leaving care team and a flexible approach to transition to the leaving care team where risky behaviours are present and to promote consistency.
125. Foster carers are safely recruited, have good access to training and there are safe caring policies in place. They are supported well by their supervising social workers through regular supervision which is appropriately focused. Supervising social workers are contactable out of hours to provide support and advice if this is required. First reviews are held in a timely manner when children are admitted in an emergency and the annual reviews of carers are robust. An independent mediation service is provided for foster carers who are subject to complaints or allegations. Foster carers say that positive action is taken when risks are identified during placement. Risk management of contact arrangements is secured in practice.
126. Good arrangements are in place to identify, recover and work with young people who go missing from home, school or care. Close operational links between Police, social care, the EXIT team for young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and RUNA mean information on runaways is shared on a daily basis, risks to individuals are assessed and joint action is agreed. Safe and well checks are conducted by the Police and where needed young people are referred for advice and guidance from specialist

services with good levels of local knowledge and expertise. Take up is high. No young people were missing from care at the time of the inspection.

127. There is effective multi-agency approach to managing risk for looked after children with focused, direct work undertaken to reduce the risk of, and to respond to, sexual exploitation. This is having an impact and ensuring early intervention. Take up on advice and guidance from specialist services with good levels of local knowledge and expertise is high. Work is undertaken in schools for groups and individuals identified at risk in relation to relationships, safety and boundaries.
128. An understanding of the role of the LADO is not sufficiently embedded across all staff teams. All social workers spoken to were aware of the role but staff were not aware if briefings had been provided in fostering and adoption teams. In one case seen by inspectors this had resulted in a notification being delayed. This was subsequently picked up through regular management audit and rigorously managed.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2 (Good)

129. Educational outcomes for looked after children are good. There is a strong commitment to improving educational outcomes, supported by very effective partnership working between schools and children's services. The 'Bolton Family' is a concept that has the full commitment of schools and is built on trust between all professionals.
130. Looked after children make good progress from their starting points. Cohorts are small and subject to year on year variation. Attainment has risen in all Key Stages over the last three years and the gap between looked after children and all pupils nationally has narrowed. In 2011, the proportion of children attaining Level 4 and above in Year 6 in English and mathematics was in line with the national average for looked after children. The percentage attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C has markedly improved and at 62% was well above the national average for looked after children in 2011. The proportion attaining good English and mathematics GCSEs was similarly above average. Children from minority ethnic groups receive very good support, taking account of their language and cultural needs, so they make similarly good progress.
131. A key factor in the success is the care taken to place children in good schools that best meet their needs and interests. Head teachers and designated teachers receive good quality training to support their role. Effective teaching and additional targeted academic and pastoral support helps looked after children achieve well. Learning mentors and a dedicated teacher, funded through the virtual schools, provide good support to help keep children engaged in education. Children who spoke with inspectors were extremely positive about their experiences at school. The progress of children placed in schools out of borough is monitored so that any

concerns about individuals' progress can be followed up. Protocols for ensuring information exchange have recently been agreed.

132. The virtual school arrangements provide effective localised support and challenge within three cluster areas. A primary and secondary school head teacher have voluntarily taken on roles as virtual head teachers within each cluster and are dedicated to their role as champions for looked after children. The arrangements are at varying stages within each cluster, meaning that school's awareness and understanding of the role varies. There are robust plans to develop and share best practice. There is a comprehensive and effective tracking system to monitor the needs and progress of looked after children. Timely additional support is funded through the virtual school and the pupils' premium grant for any who may be falling behind or struggling to fully engage with their education.
133. Almost all children have an up to date personal education plan and children and carers are fully involved in regular review. The review meetings include multi-agency representation according to the needs of the child. The inclusion of Connexions advisers and leaving care workers in Year 11 ensure continuity into post-16 education or training. Education plans are of varying quality with regard to target setting, with some that are not easily measurable. However there are good procedures to follow-up any concerns. Regular referral meetings ensure senior managers have a good oversight of the progress of each child and multi-agency support is directed appropriately and without delay.
134. All partners are fully committed to keeping children engaged in education. Permanent exclusions of looked after children are extremely rare. Fixed term exclusions are reducing because every effort is made to keep children in school. Where appropriate, adaptations are made to the curriculum to keep children motivated and engaged. If children are excluded they receive an excellent package of support and alternative curriculum to achieve well in the outstanding PRUs. Attendance is similarly improving and is above the national average for looked after children. This is the result of rigorous monitoring by schools and good support to carers and children.
135. Looked after children's emotional, social or behavioural needs are met well through a range of strategies. These include access to CAMHS, support from a dedicated educational psychologist, and targeted support to build self esteem and social skills. There are strong partnerships to support children with disabilities and those with special educational needs, with timely support from speech and language services and the disabilities team.
136. Foster carers and residential workers receive good support to help children with homework and maintain attendance at school. However there is some confusion as to the provision of laptops to children and carers feel

there is some inconsistency in their allocation. Children who met with inspectors indicated that they receive good support from carers to fulfil their ambitions.

137. Looked after children, including those with disabilities, have good opportunities to participate in positive activities and out of hours learning. They are able to access a range of universal services as well as targeted activities. The Bolton Lads and Girls Club provides a wide range of activities and a mentoring scheme to befriend and offer support to those who need it. There is a strong emphasis on healthy lifestyle and the development of personal and social skills through schemes such as 'Positive Chances', the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and 'Outdoor Learning'. Children and young people at risk of disaffection receive good personalised support to help them deal with issues, build confidence and develop skills. Foster carers interviewed are clear about making decisions about high risk activities in line with a sensible parenting approach. However they are unclear about whether children in their care are able to stay overnight at friends without Police checks being made on the receiving family.

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement

Grade 2 (Good)

138. Outcomes for looked after children and young people in making a positive contribution are good. The children in care council, Voice4U, makes a strong contribution to improving services for looked after children. Council members are active and enthusiastic advocates for looked after children and represent their views effectively. Amongst their many achievements, they are particularly proud of the award ceremony they organised in 2011. The council has produced helpful guidance for children entering care for the first time, including complaints guidance. Council members meet regularly with the Corporate Parenting Board and senior decision makers including the Director of Children's Services. They have put their views forward imaginatively and effectively through dramatisations and presentations. These channels enable them to influence policy and have led to improvements in services. Council members work hard to publicise their work through a dedicated website and promotional materials as well as through social workers and other professionals working with looked after children.
139. Looked after children and care leavers are well supported to develop effective communication skills through a range of activities that build self esteem, and enable them to have their voice heard. There are several user groups through which carers, looked after children and care leavers can contribute their views. These include residents' meetings in children's homes and evaluations of short-break services, youth services, children's centre provision, complaints and advocacy services. As a result of evaluations children and young people have been involved in training for

social workers and foster carers and have made presentations to schools. They have also contributed to the recruitment of staff. The council is keen to learn from evaluation and frequently commissions external evaluations to improve services. Surveys show a high level of satisfaction and suggestions for improvement are acted on.

140. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors feel they have a voice in pathways planning but they feel more remote from strategic decision making processes. Some care leavers have been involved in shaping a tender for accommodation and in reshaping sexual health services, which has improved accessibility. However there are not currently any forums where care leavers can meet as a group to discuss their priorities or socialise.
141. Outstanding work is undertaken to promote participation and overcome barriers for looked after children with disabilities. Short breaks and targeted programmes, such as the 'Search Project' enable children and young people to develop their learning, social and work related skills in meaningful contexts. They are fully able to voice concerns and contribute their views with confidence. A group of children with disabilities have been trained and involved in the recruitment of staff. There is a facilitative approach to promoting support for families with children with disabilities from different cultures.
142. Staff show a strong commitment to promoting children's participation in their reviews and personal education plans. Children feel they are fully involved and have their views taken into account. Further work to promote their increased involvement, for example by chairing their own meetings, is at an early stage.
143. Cohesive working between complaints and the advocacy service ensure that all looked after children can participate and voice concerns about their care. The services are well publicised and accessible, including to children placed out of area. Advocacy, mentor arrangements (for example through the Bolton Lads and Girls Club) and independent visitor provision are effective, responsive and have sufficient capacity to meet demand. Children have been involved in designing a complaints leaflet which is colourful and age appropriate. The positive approach to ensuring that complaints are dealt with at an early stage in a timely way is reflected by the low number of formal complaints taken forward.
144. Multi-agency work to prevent offending and re-offending is well embedded. Young people who are at risk receive good multi-agency support to engage them in positive activities, develop self esteem and life skills. Consequently the percentage of looked after children cautioned or convicted is below the national average.

Economic well-being**Grade 3 (Adequate)**

145. Outcomes for looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being are adequate. Direct work with care leavers provides appropriate support to help them improve outcomes. The care leaving service is in contact with almost all care leavers up to the age of 21. Those who spoke with inspectors reported that they feel well supported by their care workers and have good access to advice and support. However, the service lacks a strategic overview and does not routinely collate information so that it can compare performance against national benchmarks and monitor progress. The council recognise this and are planning to undertake a review of services. There are plans to establish a virtual college along the lines of the virtual school to monitor the progress of care leavers and provide further support with education, employment and training.
146. Care leavers receive a range of support to help them engage with further education, employment or training. Individuals receive good advice and guidance from a dedicated Connexions adviser to help them access further education or training suited to their aptitudes and interests. There are well established partnerships with Bolton College and training providers providing a range of routes. There are good opportunities for apprenticeships with Bolton Council, Bolton at Home housing provider and private providers, supported through the looked after support to employment and education (LASE) scheme.
147. Young people who find it difficult to engage receive good motivational support through services such as 'Time to Talk' mediation services and 'Raise the Youth Foundation'. These services help young people to develop work related and social skills helping them to progress into foundation learning courses, apprenticeships and further education.
148. The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training at the end of Year 11 is in line with statistical neighbours, but below the national average. The percentage of 19 year olds is similarly above statistical neighbours and below national. Care leavers are well supported to pursue post-16 qualifications suited to their needs and interests, with some imaginative course offered, for example in animal husbandry. Care leavers who wish to pursue higher education qualifications receive good support to access and sustain attendance at courses. There are currently 10 care leavers being supported through university and three more starting in 2012.
149. Pathway plans are of variable quality.. All 16 and 17 year old looked after children and care leavers have up to date pathway plans but not all pathway plans for 18 to 21 year olds had been completed at the time of the inspection. Most plans show a thorough assessment of young person's needs and detail good advice for further education options. However,

some plans lack focus in relation to promoting independence. Transition from school is well planned with Connexions and leaving care workers included in Year 11 personal education plan reviews, but foster carers are not consistently well informed about the options available to young people if they do not continue in full time education beyond 18.

150. Partnership arrangements between voluntary providers, council housing services, the leaving care team and the youth justice service result in an adequate range of housing being offered for young people leaving care. Young people receive the support they need to develop independent living skills through appropriate placements in shared accommodation with intensive support, supported lodgings or independent living with additional support. Supported accommodation is of good quality but there is a gap in services for young people in need of intensive support. The council is taking action to address this. The whereabouts of all young people is known and all are in safe accommodation. A few are in temporary lodgings with friends or in short stay emergency accommodation but their well-being is monitored and there are appropriate plans to support their moving on. No care leavers are currently in bed and breakfast accommodation and it is very rarely used. Care leavers who met with inspectors reported that placements have been appropriate, safe and relatively stable.
151. Smooth transitions for young people with disabilities are promoted through well established partnerships with adult services. The adult places for people panel responds to individual needs so that they are found appropriate placements. Children with disabilities have good access to work experience with the council through schemes such as 'Project Search'.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

152. The quality of provision is adequate. There are effective and timely arrangements in place to ensure that those that need to be looked after are in care. The multi-agency resource management panel provides creative packages of support for children on the edge of care and an early indication of the likelihood of children becoming looked after. Effective and inclusive work with parents and carers reduces the need for children to become looked after. This includes an inclusive and empowering approach to working with parents from minority ethnic groups.
153. There is effective forward planning of placements through the resource management panel and robust decision making at a senior level for those children needing emergency placements. Valuable work has taken place within the adolescent support unit to support children and young people on the edge of care and this has led to a 27% reduction of teenagers becoming looked after.

154. Efficient joint working of cases and early allocation to qualified looked after children social workers enables continuity for young people. Emergency placements are agreed at an appropriately senior level and in a timely way. Referral meetings are weekly and ensure smooth transfer of cases between referral and assessment, child protection and looked after children teams. The matching of placements for children with disabilities to receive short breaks or for longer term placements is promoted by a dedicated worker who recruits, trains and supports specialist foster carers. Parents and carers speak highly of the service in building their resilience and ability to manage.
155. Legal services have sufficient capacity to meet demand and provide emergency advice. Redeployment of staff within the legal team has improved capacity in line with strategic planning for looked after children. The average duration of court proceedings in the area is 68 weeks which is above the recommended timeframe. However, Bolton council are actively contributing to improving efficiencies in the courts and are active members of a number of regional court forums. Management information is being used to good effect to address practice that causes delays and action is being taken to produce more focused and streamlined multi-agency assessments.
156. The quality of direct work with children and families is good. There is an inclusive and effective multi-agency approach to delivering support packages to promote placement stability and help children and young people understand their life story. Short term and long term placement stability is consistently good and above statistical neighbours and national averages. Plans for permanency are promptly secured. Matching of children to placements demonstrates some sensitive work in considering cultural needs. A high proportion of looked after children are placed in borough and this is supported by good use of special guardianship orders and adoption placements. The majority of looked after children are placed with in house foster carers.
157. The quality of assessments is too variable. Whilst some are of good quality and reflect well the individual needs of children and risk and protective factors, others lack detail, do not incorporate wishes and feelings well and are insufficiently analytical. The impact of identity is not consistently well recorded and chronologies lack relevant up to date detail.
158. Children and young people are positive about where they are placed and say they receive good quality support. Statutory visits are carried out in a timely manner and children are being seen alone in their placements by qualified social workers. Statutory visits are appropriately focused although the quality of recording of the visits is too variable.
159. IRO caseloads are too high and workloads are too varied to enable adequate focus on improving care planning and the quality of services for

looked after children. This has been recognised by the service and action taken to plan for a more consistent approach. All children and young people are allocated a named IRO and practice is developing to ensure that IROs see children and young people prior to reviews of their care. Care leavers retain the same IRO to provide support at their point of transfer to the leaving care team.

160. Statutory reviews are timely but there are too many children not making a contribution to their reviews. Venue choice and timing of reviews are thought to be contributory factors.
161. Assessments and care plans are updated prior to reviews and provide a sound basis for informing future care planning. However, review recommendations are not sufficiently detailed or outcome focused and previous recommendations have to be inputted manually to the system. This increases the risk of recommendations being missed.
162. Social workers are focused on developing positive relationships with children and young people and recognise the value of spending quality time with them to inform their assessments and planning. Children and young people spoken to feel well supported by their social workers. However, some foster carers report that some social workers are too busy, do not return their calls and miss appointments.
163. The new ICS system provides a sound basis for effective social work recording and case management and records seen are up to date. However the ICS system was not initially set up to facilitate effective recording of pathway plans. This had been a contributory factor in the lack of good quality pathway plans in the leaving care team. Changes to the system have now been made to improve practice. There are also challenges in using the system to collate aggregated and accurate management information.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

164. Ambition and prioritisation are good. All Children's Trust partners demonstrate a clear commitment to children and young people. There is good evidence of strong, embedded partnership working across both statutory and voluntary sector members. Members share the Bolton 'Vision' strategy within which the Children and Young People's Plan is incorporated and retain a focus on vulnerable children. A strength of the Children's Trust Board is the strategic overview and understanding of frontline work which has resulted in support for work such as the Sleep Safe campaign.
165. The children's services scrutiny committee provides a good level of challenge and oversight of work with children and young people in Bolton. The importance of looked after children to the council is shown by the councillors concern at the educational attainment of looked after children

(Scrutiny Committee, December 2008), which led to a series of interventions resulting in improvement. The results were significant and show that councillors' concerns led to a programme of support.

166. The looked after children strategy is well informed by the joint strategic needs assessment and sits within a context of the need to make efficiency savings in expenditure for looked after children. It adopts a long term strategic approach to managing the impact of the current economic climate with a strong focus on integrating preventative services.
167. The looked after children and safeguarding 'Children's Champion' and Executive Member for children's services have a clear understanding of their role and demonstrated an exceptional commitment to safeguarding vulnerable children within Bolton. They are briefed on a weekly basis on the status of looked after children and child protection cases within the borough and question progress with an expectation for action to be taken where necessary.
168. There is a strong corporate parenting commitment and a whole authority responsibility for looked after children. This is demonstrated through; an expectation for higher than national standards required for housing for looked after children; specific commissioning of individual placements for looked after children aged 16-18 years where there is an identified need for more supportive accommodation, and a strong focus on apprenticeships. There are responsive arrangements in place to listen to the views of looked after children and this has informed service prioritisation which is outcome focused. Attendance of Voice4U at corporate board meetings has influenced policy and decision making in several areas, such as ensuring all looked after children are provided with appropriate equipment to move to independent living and venues for health assessments.
169. The strategic lead for commissioning placed has improved the dialogue with voluntary sector agencies in relation to the commissioning of services. The third sector strategic forum has been effective in the early identification of strengths and areas for development resulting in the appropriate planning of new services.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

170. Leadership and management are good. The profile of children, young people and their families is well informed by the joint strategic needs assessment and an appropriate focus on the looked after children strategy which is well understood and disseminated to staff at all levels. There are strong, embedded local partnership working and commissioning arrangements in place. Service planning is based on a rigorous and robust needs analysis. The partnership knows itself well.

171. Health partners are effectively engaged in Bolton Council's strategic planning and improvement work including the Children's Trust, Health and Care Together and local children's and adults safeguarding boards. The Health and Wellbeing board is in its infancy with a shadow health and wellbeing board in place and is developing a role with the children's trust in identifying commissioning needs.
172. The voluntary or third sector strategic forum is developing an open dialogue where strengths and areas for development can be promptly discussed at appropriately senior levels which provides clarity of expectation. The third sector members of the Children and Young People's Forum have strong communication links across their membership and with the council and staff at all levels. This has enabled forum members to benefit from access to up to date policies and procedures and information about training events. Members are clear about resource issues and how that impacts on their individual organisations and upon commissioning but consider that there is good dialogue with the council. The third sector feel well placed to respond to gaps in service provision and currently coordinate and facilitate family group conferences and provide support to young carers; a Children's Rights and Advocacy service; an independent visiting and mentoring scheme for looked after children and a service for disabled children.
173. There is a good focus on promoting value for money and quality through effective commissioning, re-commissioning and decommissioning of services to ensure the individual needs of looked after children are met. Gaps in service delivery are promptly identified and responded to in relation to provision of services in borough to meet emergency placement needs of homeless young people, advocacy arrangements and to support care leavers in supported accommodation. A flexible approach to re-commissioning has been seen in relation to the advocacy service. The commissioning of mother and baby placements illustrates the quality of Bolton's approach to the forward planning of services.
174. There is a clear and effective sufficiency strategy to provide placements for looked after children. The majority of children are placed in in-house provision. Over the last seven years there has been a significant investment in fostering to recruit and retain sufficient foster carers. This has meant that the majority of looked after children have been placed with in-house foster parents and the numbers with independent agency foster carers has reduced. A small family and friends foster carers' team has also been developed. Very few looked after children are placed in out of area foster placements and this ensures that most children do not have to travel far from their local communities and families. For those looked after children placed out of area there are strong and effective monitoring and management arrangements through the resource management panel and considered decision making with a best match approach to placements.

175. There is good reflection upon what works well within Bolton and this is due to the positive culture and relationships established across partnerships. Staff are enthusiastic, with a can do approach to finding creative solutions. Staff are valued by the service and are committed to safeguarding children. There is good investment in staff through a wide range of training opportunities and with well established career pathways resulting in high staff morale and good staff retention rates. Sickness levels are low (as reported in the unannounced inspection of contact and referral arrangements). Where there are vacancies or long term absence, recruitment is undertaken to fixed term contract positions to ensure that there is continuity across the workforce and continuity of practice working with children and young people. Staffing levels within the three district teams are good. Caseloads are manageable and the weighting system ensures that caseloads are also equitable.
176. Procedures in place for safe recruitment across the children's workforce are efficient and strong to ensure that children are safe. There is an effective workforce planning strategy. The recruitment of newly qualified workers (NQSW) has been very successful and mentoring of NQSW posts is very highly regarded. The development of NQSW's is well managed, caseloads are protected and supervision frequency in line with individual learning with good access to further development and post qualifying social work training.
177. Learning from serious case reviews has been addressed through training and action planning. Training for managers is available to support them in their role. Change management training was provided and has proved invaluable in the establishment of integrated team working.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (Adequate)

178. Performance management and quality assurance for looked after children is adequate. There is effective scrutiny of management information to ensure a maintained focus on strategic areas requiring improvement. There are weekly meetings with the Chief Executive and Directors to collectively discuss forthcoming business and issues. Performance management arrangements are strong and this is supported by political arrangements where councillors sit on separate scrutiny panels and policy development groups.
179. Management information briefings are provided to corporate parents regularly and this is used well to inform corporate parenting understanding of the looked after children profile and current practice. This has increased the scrutiny of corporate parents in driving improvement for looked after children. For example, in relation to the educational attainment of looked after children and in securing continued

financial commitment for services for asylum seeking children and their families.

180. There are efficient and accountable contracts in place with commissioned services to ensure a clear overview of their effectiveness. Regional commissioning arrangements are also subject to outcome based contracts.
181. Regular performance management information is provided and managers have a clear view of strategic planning progress through regular updates and briefings. This is shared with teams and ensures a focused approach to work. Information used is comparative in relation to team performance and statistical neighbours. Information has been well used to improve performance against key indicators. For example with regard to the revocation of care orders, timeliness and quality of work in relation to statutory visits and consultation with children and young people.
182. Staff have regular, reflective and developmentally focused supervision. Regular auditing of cases is undertaken by district and team managers in response to improving the quality and timeliness of assessment and planning work with children and young people. However, although inspectors saw some good audits of cases and effective case management arrangements, in the majority of cases seen, audits lacked rigour and did not sufficiently challenge or reflect upon the child's journey.
183. Data relating to care leavers is not aggregated to monitor the quality of service. Instead this is done on a case by case basis through auditing, case supervision and the review process. This system is not effective in providing an overview of service delivery to facilitate developments and improve outcomes.
184. Management information is not well used to inform a focus on quality in the work of IROs and the quality assurance aspect of the IRO role is underdeveloped.
185. Whilst adequate management oversight of statutory visits is in place, records do not include a rationale as to how managers arrive at decisions to reduce the frequency of visits when placements are deemed to be stable.

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