

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children Gateshead

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Lead inspector Lynn Radley HMI

Age group: All

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Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

2. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Gateshead is judged to be good.

Areas for improvement

3. In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Gateshead, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

No immediate actions were identified

Within three months:

- ensure that children and young people are made aware of and supported to use advocacy services in child protection processes
- ensure that managers record the rationale for their decisions on contacts, referrals and assessments
- ensure parents receive reports for formal meetings such as child protection conferences in good time to read and fully understand them
- ensure that the impact of children's individual diverse backgrounds on their development and welfare is fully considered and recorded in assessments.

Within six months:

- ensure that as part of participation and engagement activity children and young people are provided with opportunities to directly influence the design and commissioning of services that they use

About this inspection

4. This inspection was unannounced.
5. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. Inspectors have scrutinised case files, observed practice and discussed the help and protection given to these children and young people with social workers, managers and other professionals including members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Wherever possible, they have talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have analysed performance data, reports and management information that the local authority holds to inform its work with children and young people.
6. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.
7. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and a seconded inspector.
8. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

9. Gateshead has approximately 45,200 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 22.6% of the total population. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 6% of the total population, compared with 16.7% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups are Asian (1.9%), Mixed (0.8%), Black (0.5%) and other (0.5%). The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is 4.2% and below the national figure of 17.5%.
10. The referral and assessment team receives and responds to all contacts and referrals to children's social care. A team of social workers undertake initial assessments, section 47 investigations and core assessments. Following assessment cases requiring longer term child protection or child in need support are transferred to one of four safeguarding and care

planning teams or to the disabled children's team. An emergency duty team works closely with the referral and assessment team and offers an out of hours service. Commissioned services provide intensive family support services which are closely aligned to children's social care teams. At the time of the inspection 193 children were subject to a child protection plan.

11. Early help services are provided by the centrally based family intervention team (FIT). The team provides support delivered through the common assessment framework (CAF) and team around the family (TAF) model involving a range of partner agencies in delivering comprehensive packages of support to meet individual families' identified needs. In addition there is a network of 10 children's centres, based on a hub and satellite model offering a range of activities and services including lower level family support and parenting programme.

Overall effectiveness

12. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Gateshead Council is judged to be good. The impact of the impressive and strong leadership in delivering a clear strategic vision is demonstrated by the successful delivery of a comprehensive plan of service improvements for children and young people. Increased staffing and management in social work teams, combined with service redesign and the implementation of a good quality early help and prevention strategy, has led to significant benefits for vulnerable children and young people. Senior managers across the partnership have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and have responded very effectively to the findings of previous inspections. Children and young people are not routinely engaged in the early stages of service design so their influence is not always as strong as it could be. Improvements in the quality of child protection plans and thorough quality assurance of front line practice are contributing to good outcomes for children and their families. Robust management oversight and well informed decision making has resulted in good quality social work practice which effectively helps and protects children. However, managers do not routinely explicitly record their rationale for decision making on contacts and referrals and this would be beneficial. The establishment of a family intervention team (FIT) to provide support to children with high levels of need is successfully maintaining children at home without recourse to statutory services. Elected members are visible, well informed about the protection of children and provide appropriate challenge and support to officers.
13. Partner agencies in Gateshead understand thresholds well and apply them consistently when making appropriate referrals to children's social care. Early help is good and provided by a wide range of agencies and services. Good partnership working with the third sector ensures the needs of the community are met well. Agencies work well together and produce common assessments of good quality that are routinely used to assess and deliver support services at an early stage. The children's social care duty team provide a good quality, timely response to contacts and referrals. Notifications of domestic violence are initially screened by the police and dealt with quickly and robustly within the referral and assessment team. The quality of practice within children's social care to protect children from immediate risk of harm is good overall. Significant work by managers has resulted in the outstanding practice evident in some child protection investigations. Some assessments do not however, fully consider the impact of a child's diverse cultural background on their development
14. Children subject to child protection, child in need and team around the family plans (TAF) benefit from well-coordinated, multi-agency work which reduces risk of harm, prevents escalation of concerns and supports improvements in self-esteem and behaviour. Recent child protection plans

are of a good standard; outcome focused and clearly identify what needs to happen to ensure a child is safe. However, parents do not always receive reports presented to conferences in sufficient time to consider them fully. All plans are reviewed regularly and their progress is monitored effectively.

15. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has appropriate governance arrangements and provides very effective leadership and challenge across the partnership. A strong independent Chair appropriately challenges partners and has implemented significant improvements in the Board's structure and focus. Learning from serious case reviews and from an independent peer review has underpinned recent improvements and has full engagement of all key partners. The LSCB has, in conjunction with the two other South Tyneside Boards in the South of Tyne sub region, very effectively maximised resources and increased consistency by implementing shared policies and procedures. A good quality strategy to address the needs of children at risk of or being sexually exploited is in place. The missing and exploited group (MEG) provides good monitoring of children and young people who go missing and are alert to early warning signs of exploitation.

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers

16. The effectiveness of help and protection provided to children, young people and their carers is good. No cases were identified by inspectors where children and young people had been left at risk of significant harm. Where concerns are identified prompt, child focused and well coordinated action is taken to protect and help children. Child protection investigations are especially effective in protecting children. The risk to children and young people is effectively reduced by the wide range of accessible and high quality services provided by the local authority and partner agencies to children and their families.
17. When children and young people are in need of early help or protection, their needs are effectively communicated in a timely way to social care services by agencies such as schools. Where they do not require statutory services, consistent and appropriate action is taken by social care services to signpost these cases to other agencies such as the freedom programme for other forms of help. Work undertaken by the out of hours emergency duty team is at least satisfactory and in some cases seen highly effective. Good communication and information sharing with day time services ensures families in need of further social care intervention are appropriately identified.
18. The offer of early help is good, child centred and available to children and young people from very earliest emergence of a problem at every stage of their journey from pre-birth to 19. A wide range of effective services are

available including family group conferencing, a selection of parenting programmes and substance misuse services complemented by a variety of family support services commissioned from the third sector. Common assessment framework (CAF) and team around the family (TAF) processes ensure effective help is provided promptly and overseen by lead professionals from a range of agencies including children's centres, schools and health visitors. Quality assurance of CAFs by a centrally based team ensures consistency and appropriate standards. Staff from a range of agencies undertaking direct work successfully engage children and families. This results in families reporting that they receive the right help at the right time and clearly understand the intentions of the support they are offered. Most children and families contribute actively to their plans and positive outcomes are achieved as a result of their engagement. For example parents report their children making improvements in school; taking up out of school activities and more positive relationships with schools so that as a result of working together effectively their children's needs are met. In circumstances where concerns escalate cases are appropriately stepped up to the FIT or social work teams ensuring the right level of protection. For families whose needs are urgent and require an immediate response to avert breakdown, agencies such as Barnardo's and Children North East's intensive family support projects provide a very rapid and comprehensive service.

19. The co-location of social work and FIT has resulted in good arrangements which ensure information about vulnerable children is shared easily between professionals. Further, the inclusion of specific staff to work with children identified as meeting the criteria for 'Families Gateshead' (Gateshead Council's response to the Troubled Families initiative) adds to the range and depth of information available. Work with children subject to plans is good and effectively meets individual needs, reducing and managing risks.
20. A wide range of commissioned services and partner agencies provide appropriate, good quality services to support the objectives of both child protection and child in need plans. As a result, risks are minimised and children's cases are de-escalated from child protection processes in a timely way. In a very small number of cases the risk identified did not clearly justify the need for continued use of a child protection plan. However in these cases children and families were benefiting from the support offered. Where children and families are moving out of the area and subject to child protection processes, children are effectively protected through rigorous transfer arrangements with the receiving local authority. For all children subject to plans, work is child focused and their welfare at the heart of all professional activity.
21. Children and young people have a good understanding of the work undertaken to help and support them. Their understanding is enhanced by the support they receive to participate in child in need and TAF meetings.

In the vast majority of cases evidence clearly demonstrates that their voice and views are influential within those meetings. For example where children have witnessed domestic violence highly skilled work is undertaken by specialist workers to explore their experiences and help ensure the risk they face is fully understood. The outcome from the work informs meetings and serves to more accurately protect the child. An effective range of tools and skills are used to assist disabled children to communicate their wishes and feelings. As a result, services such as intimate personal care routines in respite care have been changed to meet their needs more effectively.

22. The individual needs of children are recognised well in plans, for instance when there are several siblings with a range of different needs each has an individually tailored plan. Where children or their families do not have English as their first language good arrangements for providing interpreters ensure that all views are understood. However, in a very small number of cases the impact and customs of a child's culture and faith are not always fully taken account of. The needs of children with a disability are identified very well and highly effective multi-agency work in partnership with parents demonstrates success in areas such as in reducing self-harm. Where children with a disability have increasing or high levels of need services flexibly respond, for instance offering short breaks. For young men whose emotional well-being is a concern and who were previously not receiving a service, 'The Young Arrows' project has had a positive impact on their school attendance, self-esteem and protection.
23. Children's centres are well used by local communities. Good planning in the use of resources targets the help offered by children's centres to communities most in need. Early help is flexible, and for instance there is a variety of parenting programmes on offer, which facilitates parent's engagement. Parents who attend children's centres comment how their understanding of parenting and managing behaviour has been significantly increased. Programmes to enhance employability are effective and childcare settings such as children's centres are improving attainment at the Early Years Foundation Stage. Family's access to services has been maintained by the imaginative use of resources despite financial constraints. The awareness of procedures to protect children in children's centres provided by locality groups has improved through effective partnership working, for instance in the Orthodox Jewish community. Families and communities who have historically been difficult to engage with have been effectively encouraged to use children's centre services through targeted work. Children's centres which currently provide services are judged adequate or good in recent Ofsted inspections.
24. Procedures to ensure the safety of children living in private fostering arrangements (PFA) are appropriate. A well-developed strategy to raise awareness across agencies and the community resulted in an increase in

the notifications of PFA in the last year although presently no children are subject to PFA. Procedures for children missing from education are well established and understood. Evidence demonstrates their effective use in tracking children missing education when they move across different local authorities. An effective joint protocol is in place to manage children who are missing. Repeated incidents of missing are monitored and assessed by the well-established MEG, a high level multi-agency group who meet regularly. A model similar to the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) model used in domestic abuse cases is used well for sharing intelligence in relation to patterns of behaviour as well as individual cases, with the result that preventative action is taken that reduces risk to children. This model also flags up children who are missing for a few hours but who may be at risk of sexual exploitation. Presently, following a period of intense intelligence gathering, the LSCB is satisfied that there is no current organised crime in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Gateshead.

The quality of practice

25. The quality of practice is good. Thresholds for access to services are understood well by partners and training delivered by social work managers has supported their consistent application. The recently revised threshold document is firmly embedded in practice and used routinely by social workers and partners. The document clearly defines indicators of risk and need and provides comprehensive guidance about appropriate level of intervention required. Families receive good support through CAF and TAF processes that deliver an integrated approach to supporting families well and ensure the on-going safety and welfare of children and young people. When risks increase or work is not resulting in the desired outcomes, this is quickly identified and escalated when necessary.
26. The duty team provide social work expertise and good advice to partner agencies in determining the appropriateness of referrals, and offer guidance in signposting to other agencies. Almost all contacts and referrals are dealt with within statutory timescales. Historical information is effectively analysed and documented well within the contact and referral record and this informs sound decision making. The decision to close contacts is supported by strong social work analysis which gives clarity about reasons for decisions. The vast majority of contacts are closed appropriately and are always signed off by an experienced manager. However, the management rationale for decision making although appropriate is not routinely recorded on the electronic contact and referral record. Effective information sharing between the police and children's social care ensures that police child concern notifications receive a timely response. Good systems are in place in the duty team in relation to inform referrers about the outcome of referrals into the service.

27. The quality of assessments is generally good. However, some are adequate due to insufficient consideration of how children's identity and cultural needs will be addressed although their ethnicity is routinely recorded. Assessments are timely; child focused and routinely consider historical information, clearly identifying risk and protective factors. The quality of analysis is good and leads to recommendations which coherently address identified needs. Assessments of unborn babies are undertaken at an early stage and appropriately identify potential risks and strengths. Children and young people are seen alone where appropriate and are fully involved in the assessment process. Children's views and feelings are explored and reflected well in assessments. The assessment process supports effective case planning and results in targeted interventions to reduce risk and the provision of appropriate support. Where domestic abuse is feature, multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) risk assessments are undertaken promptly leading to the provision of extensive support. Support and help for families is managed well by rigorous tracking and monitoring, and effective partnership working. The quality of CAFs is good overall and leads to effective multi-agency interventions and effective early support for families.
28. Timely, coherent case recording is evident on all case files which reflect purposeful and good quality work in the vast majority of cases. Chronologies are of outstanding quality; they are detailed, up to date and appropriately record significant events including historical involvement with social care and other key agencies. Staff make good use of chronologies to inform assessments and case planning.
29. The quality of child protection investigations is at least good and some are of outstanding quality. When child protection concerns are identified very effective partnership working with the police ensures that almost all strategy discussions and meetings are undertaken face to face. The recording of strategy discussions and actions is very good and ensures that professionals are clear about who is accountable for undertaking specific tasks. All child protection investigations are carried out by suitably experienced social workers. Timely interventions lead to thorough investigations and children are seen and seen alone. Historical information drawn from chronologies in relation to risk is considered well and findings in relation to significant harm are clear. Social workers are supported well by robust management oversight and effective decision making. Outcomes of child protection enquiries are overseen firstly by team managers then service managers for further scrutiny and sign off.
30. Child protection conferences are chaired effectively, well attended by partners and facilitated by experienced and skilled child protection chairs. Conferences clearly identify risks and there is a strong focus on ensuring the on-going needs of the child are comprehensively met. Appropriate processes are in place to enable the chairs to challenge drift and delay and this information is utilised effectively to improve practice. Well

attended multi-agency meetings robustly review plans in order to make sure that the support is responsive to changing needs and levels of risk. All participants are strongly focused on ensuring that plans are effective in achieving the best outcomes for children. Parents are largely well prepared and understand the purpose of multi-agency meetings and the implications and seriousness of the recommendations being considered and the decisions made. However, reports are not always shared effectively with parents beforehand, which can make it challenging for them to fully understand professional opinions. Support for children to attend conferences and other formal meetings is available from an advocacy service. Informal advocacy is also available through the Children's Rights Officer. However, the take up is low and at present children and young people rarely attend their own child protection conference.

31. The quality of the recording of child protection and child in need plans is generally good. Managers have successfully achieved significant improvements in the quality of plans by ensuring through good design and robust oversight that plans are purposeful and outcome focused. More recent plans recorded using the updated format evidence, comprehensive planning and clear actions which are timely and specific. Clear contingency planning is evident within case files. A small minority of older plans seen are not outcome focused, are vague and offer limited information in relation to specific tasks and targets. In those circumstances inspectors found that despite the poorer quality of the written plans there is no negative impact on implementing appropriate actions or the provision of services.
32. In cases seen social workers are skilled at engaging children and enabling them to express their views, wishes and feelings. Innovative age appropriate communication methods are used well to engage younger children, children who have a disability and children whose first language is not English. Concerted attempts are made by social workers to ensure that the experience of the child is fully understood and their experiences are reflected well within assessments and planning. One example demonstrated creativity in the way that the social worker had communicated and engaged with a child leading to them being involved in writing their own child protection plan.
33. Decision making, management oversight and supervisory responsibilities are held at a suitable level of seniority and are exercised robustly. Managers have good and thorough oversight of case work via formal and informal supervision and committed workflow monitoring. Management oversight is effective in ensuring that work progresses in a timely way and avoids drift which is evidenced by timely recording on individual case files. However, although managers make decisions that result in the provision of services and interventions to appropriately meet children's needs the

rationale for decision making is not explicitly recorded on assessment records which would be beneficial.

34. Staff receive regular supervision which is of a high standard. The outcome of case supervision is recorded appropriately on children's individual case records and sets out on-going work, decisions and agreed actions. All social workers comment positively about their experiences of supervision and value the opportunities provided by their managers for critical reflection, challenge and to discuss their professional development.

Leadership and governance

35. Leadership and governance is outstanding. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) is a highly effective, visible leader who has successfully led a comprehensive and ambitious journey of improvement since the safeguarding and looked after inspection of February 2011. Excellent commitment to improvement by both elected members and senior officers is evidenced by the significant additional resources made available to improve quality standards in referral and assessment services and establish the ambitious family intervention team (FIT). The council's thorough engagement with the Troubled Families initiative has resulted in 'Families Gateshead' a programme which builds on the already successful and established CAF model. Although only launched in September 2012 the programme is demonstrating early success with seven families having already achieved their desired outcomes. Very good levels of engagement with partners such as schools has ensured multi-agency buy in to progress the change agenda.
36. Accountabilities and responsibilities between the LSCB, the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services are clear, well understood and strategic bodies work very well together. An effective Children's Trust oversees the Children and Young People's Plan which is a strong, outcome focused plan clearly setting out the Trust's response to the changing political and economic context whilst keeping the protection of children at its core. Wide ranging, effective engagement of the third sector is integral to the delivery model and the Trust has a good and sustained record of successfully designing and developing services which accurately meet need. The early intervention and prevention strategy is ambitious and comprehensive evidencing excellent multi-agency strategic leadership. Work to meet priorities in early help and intervention is well advanced.
37. Elected members commitment to and championing for children is evidenced by their success in securing additional resources for children's social care and in their engagement with officers and young people's activities. Effective two weekly portfolio meetings ensure the Lead Member is well informed and she routinely attends events such as the 'speed dating' challenge event, where young people have access to a wide

range of chief officers and decision makers, led by the Youth Assembly. Children's Overview and Scrutiny Panel champion some of the most vulnerable young people by challenging providers to do more. For instance schools and head teachers have been challenged to extend their provision of the very successful project 'The Young Arrows' who work with vulnerable young men who have low self-esteem and/or sexual identity issues and do not access education. The project has had an impressive impact in improving attendance and reducing bullying of the attendees.

38. The LSCB meets its statutory duties, is effective and highly responsive. Partner engagement is good with representation from all key partners. Evidence of the Chair's ability to challenge and drive rapid improvement is demonstrated by the change in police shift patterns to ensure a comprehensive service which meets all of its child protection responsibilities such as attendance at strategy meetings. Further, the Board has very effectively changed its structure as a result of peer challenge recommendations which has led to more efficient business processes and a sharper focus on its key priorities. A very good CSE strategy based on a proven model of intervention is due to be implemented imminently and clearly prioritises prevention, protection, disruption and prosecution. Regular meetings with senior officers as well as scrutiny of management information result in an effective focus on child protection work which is reflected in the Board's annual report. Work between the three LSCBs of the South of Tyne sub region is highly effective with a consistent Vice Chair sitting on all three boards. Their improvements are significant and include shared policies, procedures and strategies. Systematic multi-agency auditing is a high priority and plans are in place to commence implementation imminently.
39. Performance management in children's social care is dynamic and highly effective with strong evidence of impact in significantly improving both front line practice and management. Rigorous, effective case file audits are completed routinely by senior and front line managers guided by a framework of comprehensive quality standards. Good practice is evidenced by required actions being flagged within the electronic case files so that remedial action is taken and managers can track progress. Evidence of this being applied is clearly demonstrated in case files and results in improved practice. Managers use management information and monthly performance clinics to accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses. Good, timely work is undertaken to address shortfalls such as the prompt and successful action to implement Civica (electronic document management system) resulting in greatly improved performance in the use of chronologies to inform analysis and case planning. Staff are fully engaged in the improvement agenda and social workers are encouraged and enabled to express their opinions to managers via the peer review group.

40. Appropriate medium term financial planning across the council informs annual budget setting and takes account of central government constraints. Core services are well protected and the council continually reassesses how services for the most vulnerable children and their families can be delivered well with available and diminishing resources. Effective, imaginative work has refocused plans so that resources are targeted on core provision whilst more bespoke or specialist services are now provided via personalised budgets or commissioning of services to meet individual need.
41. The council and its partners have an excellent understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and ensure statutory requirements are met. Learning from inspection findings, peer review and serious case reviews is very good and underpins the significant positive change in the organisational culture of protecting and helping children, young people and their families. Complaints are routinely analysed and there is evidence of how learning is taken forward and used to improve practice. The response to learning from the most recent serious case review is good and all multi-agency actions have been completed in a timely manner. In addition, briefing sessions on lessons learned have been delivered to practitioners and elected members. Management oversight of casework is robust, effective and is multi-layered. Rigorous oversight of child protection investigations has led to consistent, high quality decision making ensuring that risks to children are assessed in a multi-agency, most thorough manner taking full account of historical factors.
42. Supervision of staff is of excellent quality, recorded well and routinely includes good levels of challenge, reflection and support. The recently updated supervision policy includes the requirement of regular practice observations of social workers by managers adding a significant layer of oversight of practice and enabling weaknesses to be identified and acted upon. Records of practice observations in half of the supervision files inspected are of outstanding quality and demonstrate manager's detailed awareness of individual worker's abilities. Newly qualified social workers (NQSW) are well supported and good arrangements are in place to provide career progression pathways. Good collaborative work with sub-regional partners has resulted in the commission and delivery of training for first tier managers. Arrangements to manage capabilities are effective and robust action is taken to deal with poor performance.
43. The Children and Young People's Engagement strategy is satisfactory and managers of services across the council regularly engage and consult with young people. For example in September 2012 the authority organised a 'Power Breakfast' with representatives from the Youth Assembly to look at the effectiveness of arrangements for disabled children and young people. An active Disabled Children's Forum has influenced changes made to services they use such as amendments to the service specification for shorts breaks and in evaluating submitted tenders.

44. Children’s workforce development is part of an embedded culture within the council. Work is formalised through a good quality, annually reviewed plan which contains priority areas for development such as disabled children and child sexual exploitation. Impact of training is good with managers reporting on improvements in the quality of parenting assessment reports following their staff being trained. Recruitment and retention is good with only one social work vacancy and the workforce broadly reflects the local community.

Record of main findings

Local authority arrangements for the protection of children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers	Good
The quality of practice	Good
Leadership and governance	Outstanding