

# Derbyshire County Council

## Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and Care Leavers

and

## Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board<sup>1</sup>

**Inspection date: 19 November 2013 – 11 December 2013**

<p>The overall judgement is <b>good</b>.</p> <p>The Local Authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for good. It is Ofsted's expectation that as a minimum all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.</p>		
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		<b>Good</b>
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>		<b>Good</b>
	2.1 Adoption performance	<b>Good</b>
	2.2 Experiences and progress of Care Leavers	<b>Good</b>
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>		<b>Good</b>

The judgement for the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is **requires improvement**.

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of Local Authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

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## **Section 1: the Local Authority**

### **Summary of key findings**

#### **This Local Authority is good because:**

- When agencies have worries about children and young people, they know how to contact, and make a referral to Children and Younger Adults Services (CAYA) to ensure that children are helped and protected.
- Children and families who are assessed as needing early help and support receive good services from locally based Multi-Agency teams (MAT). The support provided and coordinated by a range of professionals helps improve the lives of children, young people and their families.
- Social workers assess children's needs for help and protection well. Children are always seen and asked about how they feel and what they need to keep them safe and well. The assessments highlight any risks to children and young people and are used to support social workers in making decisions about how to keep children safe. When necessary, there is a direct offer of help to address any needs that have been identified.
- Social workers are effective at using different ways to develop good relationships with children and young people. For example, social workers trained in 'systemic practice' have been able to engage families who have found it difficult to work with professionals. The relationships social workers develop with families help them to protect children from harm.
- Leaders and managers have been successful in improving services for children over a sustained period of time. They have clear plans for further improving services based on a thorough understanding of their current strengths and weaknesses.
- The council and partner agencies have ensured that they have provided funding for the help and protection of children. This has helped agencies work together to respond to children in need of support and protection. For example, the police have seconded six police sergeants to work as team managers in the MATs.
- The Local Authority has very high expectations; because of this, outcomes for children and young people are improving. Social workers are clear about the high standards of professional practice required by senior managers and are working to achieve good outcomes for children.
- The Local Authority has a vibrant Children in Care council that is well supported and has helped improve the experience of looked after children. For example, by developing more child friendly ways of recording looked after reviews.
- Social workers work well with judges and the Children and Family Court's Advisory Service (Cafcass). This means that when there are continuing concerns, legal decisions are made quickly to ensure children are safe, and there are plans to achieve permanence.

- Children who become looked after are well matched with their carers and are well cared for. When children cannot live with their own families, social workers work hard to find and match children to permanent families.
- When a young person is ready to leave care, there is a good range of accommodation and supportive living arrangements to ensure that young people have a wide choice about where they live. This includes the 'Staying Put' programme which enables young people to remain with their foster carers after they reach 18.
- Senior managers want the best for children who live in Derbyshire and make sure they regularly visit social work teams. This helps them maintain a good understanding of how social workers are helping children and what is needed to improve services.
- The Local Authority is highly committed to ensuring services are responsive and staff are well trained. Additional social workers have been recruited and the workforce is sufficient to meet the needs of the volume of children. The Local Authority has effective commissioning arrangements, which ensures that services are responsive to local needs. Examples of this include developing short breaks for disabled children and ensuring services are provided to work with perpetrators of domestic violence.

## **What does the Local Authority need to improve?**

### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensure that management oversight and decisions, including the rationale for decisions, are always clearly recorded on all children's files to inform practice and ensure a full and accurate record.
- Ensure that there is a consistent approach to the recording of strategy meetings so that actions, and responsibility for actions, are clearly recorded and minutes of meetings are always available on the child's electronic record.
- Develop systems for gathering feedback from children and families who have experience of child protection services to inform the development of services.
- Collate and evaluate information on the health needs of looked after children to inform the development and targeting of services.
- Develop the role of the virtual headteacher in challenging and supporting school leaders to ensure the progress of looked after children at Key Stages 1 to 3 so that their attainment improves to at least the levels expected for their age.
- Ensure that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) meet all the requirements of statutory guidance on the function of IROs. This is particularly in relation to case management and review for looked after children, and includes meeting the child before the first review, receiving copies of all relevant court documents and being kept fully informed of the progress of the child's case, during and at the conclusion of the proceedings.

- Ensure that pathway plans for young people aged 16 and 17 are of a consistently good quality and ensure all Care Leavers receive a copy of their health history.
- Ensure that sufficient adoption placements are available for children with disabilities and complex needs, and that children move to live with these adopters as soon as they are ready.
- Ensure good quality adoption support plans are consistently included in children's and adopters' records, and are responsive to their changing needs throughout their childhood.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other, and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the Local Authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the Local Authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of Local Authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

### **The inspection team**

Lead inspector: Fiona J Millns

Team inspectors: Linda Steele, Wendy Ghaffar, Shirley Bailey, Robert Pyner, John Mitchell, Carolyn Spray and Christine Williams.

## Information about this Local Authority area<sup>2</sup>

### Children living in this area

- Approximately 155,797 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Derbyshire. This is 20% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 16.4% of the Local Authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 15.3% (the national average is 18.1%);
  - in secondary schools is 12.2% (the national average is 15.1%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 4.1% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Mixed and Asian and Asian British.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 1.6% (the national average is 18.1%);
  - in secondary schools is 1.1% (the national average is 13.6%).

### Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2013, 4410 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 4829 at 31 March 2012.
- At 31 March 2013, 588 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 552 at 31 March 2012.
- At 31 March 2013, 7 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from 18 at 31 March 2012.

### Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2013, 664 children were being looked after by the LA (a rate of 43 per 10,000 children). This is a decrease from 700 (45 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2012:
  - Of this number 176 (or 26.5%) lived outside the Local Authority area;
  - 28 lived in residential children's homes, of whom 35.7% lived out of the authority;

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<sup>2</sup> The Local Authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

- 6 lived in residential special schools (all 3rd sector), of whom 83.3% lived out of the authority area, 482 lived with foster families, of whom 27.0% lived out of the authority area;
- 10 lived with parents, of whom 20.0% lived out of the authority area;
- Fewer than 5 children (exact number suppressed) were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

■ In the last 12 months there have been:

- 75 adoptions;
- 11 children became subject of special guardianship orders;
- 312 children who have ceased to be looked after, of whom 6.4% subsequently returned to be looked after;
- 63 children and young people who have ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living;
- 13 children and young people who have ceased to be looked after and are now (at 31 March 2013) living in houses of multiple occupation.

### **Other Ofsted inspections**

- The Local Authority operates 13 children’s homes. Nine were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent full Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of Derbyshire’s safeguarding arrangements was in May 2011. The Local Authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Derbyshire’s services for looked after children was in May 2011. The Local Authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Derbyshire’s Adoption services was in October 2011. The Local Authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Derbyshire’s Fostering services was in March 2012. The Local Authority was judged to be good.

### **Other information about this area**

- The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since September 2011.
- The Chair of the LSCB was appointed as interim Independent Chair for Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) on 14 November 2012, then as permanent Independent Chair on 1 March 2013.



## **Inspection judgements about the Local Authority**

### **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection are good.**

- When safeguarding and child protection issues are identified, they are responded to in a timely manner by the Children and Younger Adults Service (CAYA). This includes when concerns arise out of hours. Effective coordinated work is undertaken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people. Cases are allocated promptly and at the time of the inspection there were no unallocated cases. Once children are identified as at risk of significant harm, child protection enquiries are prioritised. There are good arrangements with the police to undertake child protection enquiries and these are conducted by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.
- Strategy meetings and discussions are timely and the decisions made are appropriate. As a result, actions are taken to identify and address children's protection needs. There are, however, inconsistent approaches to the management and recording of these meetings. This lack of consistency could lead to significant information not being readily available to the out of hours service. Moreover, inconsistency in recording could lead to confusion around the actions required to ensure children are adequately protected.
- A good range of early help services supported by a clear and recently refreshed threshold document, mean that children and parents can access services appropriate to their differing needs. Partner agencies report that they understand thresholds for access to children's social care. Partner agencies know that if they need to discuss concerns they can contact 'Call Derbyshire' or the local duty team to speak to a social worker.
- Robust arrangements for the screening of domestic abuse notifications to the police in the Central Referral Unit ensure that high risk cases are immediately referred to children's social care. Good information sharing, (including with health, schools, and pathways of referral to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) enables a coordinated multi-agency response. This information sharing also reflects a clear shared understanding and approach to risk in relation to children living in households where there is domestic abuse.
- Nearly all assessments are of good quality and some are very good. They are timely, comprehensive and proportionate to risk. The majority of assessments seen are child focused. Historical context and risk factors are considered effectively in most assessments. For the purpose of both initial and core assessments, children are seen and seen alone. There is evidence of observation of children's presentations and relationships with parents, as well as thorough consideration of the impact of parental behaviours, (such as substance misuse and domestic abuse) on children's emotional well-being and safety. Clear and thorough analysis of risk results in appropriate decisions and planning, with a direct offer of help to address identified needs.

- There is an effective and comprehensive early help offer delivered by the Multi-Agency Teams (MAT) and children's centres, which is having a significant and positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. A locality based service is now established, which involves a range of professionals, including children's services staff, health visitors, schools and members of voluntary and community groups. This means that when concerns are first identified, support can be offered to different family members according to age and need. The common assessment framework (CAF) is used to assess and support early help for children and families. There are examples of CAF being used well, such as in planning to protect children missing and at risk of sexual exploitation.
- MAT workers receive a good range of support, supervision and training. This includes consultation from senior practitioners as well as children and adolescent mental health services, to help them effectively address children's needs.
- Social workers use a range of creative techniques to establish and develop constructive relationships with children and young people and reduce risk. Children are visited regularly in accordance with plans. Additional visits, including evening and unannounced, are made when necessary. Most case records are up to date and demonstrate that children are seen, and seen alone, where appropriate. Children and young people do not participate as fully as possible in the child protection planning process. There are low levels of attendance by children and young people at core groups and case conferences. There is no advocacy service available to children who are subject to child protection plans, although the Local Authority has clear plans to introduce this service from January 2014.
- Case files demonstrated that the individual and diverse needs of children, including needs arising out of disability, ethnicity, language, gender and sexual orientation, were being addressed well. Social workers identified where there were specific needs to be considered to ensure that any support and intervention was effective, for example, in initiating life story work and direct work to support children's self-esteem and build their resilience.
- The quality of children and young people's written plans varies greatly. Examples were seen of good plans but others lacked clarity on actions and timescales. In a few cases there were too many actions, making it difficult for families and professionals to identify the key area of risk to be prioritised. A new format for plans has been in place since 1 October 2013, providing more clarity in terms of actions, timescales and responsibility for actions and outcomes. Despite the varied standards of written plans, overall the work undertaken was timely and effective. Core groups and conferences are timely and purposeful, and are usually well attended by partner agencies that provide written reports. However, there is no system to improve service provision by collating feedback from families and young people on their views and experiences of child protection processes.
- Whilst there has been some development to the electronic recording system to promote consistent use of chronologies to inform planning and assessment, these still vary in quality and, in a small number of cases, chronologies had not been completed. Some chronologies, especially those for court work are of a good

standard, others are basic in content, which can make it more difficult to gain a clear understanding of a child's history from their case records. The Local Authority is aware of this and has introduced a programme of district based training for frontline staff and managers.

- Children, young people and families benefit from stable relationships with social workers. In many cases social workers work with families from the commencement of an initial assessment and remain the key worker, unless the child becomes looked after. There are good arrangements for the transition of cases between teams, including both escalation and de-escalation when children's circumstances and needs change, as well as effective use of co-working. Close working arrangements between the MAT and children and families teams ensure a timely and smooth transition between the teams and good continuity for children and families.
- There are some very good examples of social workers working effectively to engage families who have been resistant to professional intervention. Inspectors saw some good examples of systemic practice approaches being applied to build relationships and support positive change within families. The authority is rolling out the use of this approach across its social care workforce. Parents talked positively about the quality of their relationships with social workers, who they report to be open, honest and respectful.
- The recording of management decision making varies greatly in quality. In the majority of cases this was adequate. Some examples were seen of very good and timely recording by managers, which clearly identified the required actions to ensure children are protected and the rationale for decisions made. In other cases, management decision making is not routinely recorded, and in some, the reasons for management decisions is not evident in case recording. This inconsistency can result in important information not being readily available to inform actions and interventions.
- The authority has suitable arrangements for identifying and tracking young people who are missing from home, care or education, as well as those at risk of sexual exploitation. A child protection manager from children's social care is co-located within the police central referral unit. This ensures effective and timely information sharing between the police, children's social care, education and the youth offending service. Risks are identified and well managed. The Vulnerable Young People's Panel and High Risk Panel provide forums for multi-agency information sharing and planning to reduce risk for those young people most at risk. Looked after children who are assessed as being at risk of child sexual exploitation are effectively managed with clear and appropriate use of child protection processes. As a result, in cases seen by inspectors there is evidence of effective and timely information sharing, and of clear planning and actions to reduce risk and provide support to young people.
- Schools know about their responsibilities and take appropriate action when a child or young person is missing from education. A Children Missing Education Coordinator is located in the police central referral unit ensuring that information is shared promptly and any safeguarding concerns are addressed.

## **The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence are good.**

- In nearly all cases, decisions to look after children are timely, proportionate and based on a multi-agency analysis of risk. Edge of Care panels provide effective management oversight to ensure only those children who need to be looked after come into care.
- Pre-proceedings work is appropriately focused and the vast majority of cases enter the court arena at the right time for the child. There are strong strategic and operational partnerships with the judiciary and the Children and Family Court's Advisory Service. There has been steady improvement in timescales for court proceedings. The current average of 22 weeks consistently exceeds expectations outlined by the Family Justice Board and significantly reduces delay for children. Social work assessments of children's attachments are of good quality and are used to inform care planning decisions, thus reducing reliance on expert witnesses.
- Children are consulted regularly about their wishes and feelings. They are encouraged through a variety of means to make sense of their present and past experience. Creative and often inventive ways are used to assist younger children, and children with communication difficulties, to make their feelings known. Innovative multi-agency work undertaken with disabled children is of a high standard, leading to children meeting and sometimes exceeding developmental, social and educational expectations.
- Looked after children have appropriate levels of contact with parents and their brothers and sisters. Good quality assessments of the needs of individual children within brother and sister groups, and their attachments to each other, are undertaken. These are used to match children to suitable placements and ensure that children, who cannot live together because of conflicting needs, retain appropriate and meaningful contact with each other.
- The introduction of systemic models of practice has led to a greater understanding of the importance of contact with adults who are not related to the child. An example of this is children being assisted to keep in touch with previous foster carers.
- The requirements of statutory guidance on the functions of IROs in relation to case management and review for looked after children are not fully implemented. For example, they are not provided with all relevant documents for children in court proceedings, and sometimes do not see children before their first review due to time constraints.
- The timeliness of looked after children reviews has significantly improved. However, the impact of the reviewing process in achieving the right outcomes for young people at the right time is not evaluated.
- There is clear evidence of IROs challenging arrangements and plans for children on an individual casework basis, leading to real improvements in the lives of the

children concerned. However, a formal dispute protocol has only recently been agreed. The Local Authority has taken positive steps to ensure IROs play an increasingly strategic role however the service's ability to measure performance, identify themes and to hold services to account is not yet sufficiently robust.

- The Local Authority has a sufficiency action plan that is informed by a detailed understanding of the profile of its looked after children. Identified gaps in its own provision and in commissioned services are being addressed through a variety of means. This includes rapid viability assessments of potential family and friends as carers, as well as an ambitious ongoing foster care recruitment strategy targeted at carers for priority groups, including disabled children, teenagers, and brother and sister groups. Imaginative solutions are being used to retain and recruit carers, for example, providing home extensions to facilitate a commitment to permanent homes for young people.
- The Local Authority has good arrangements for the commissioning of placements for looked after children. This has contributed to a reduction in placement moves for looked after children, with those experiencing three or more moves in a 12 month period reducing from 10.2% in 2010-2011 to 6.6% during the 12 months ending September 2013.
- Whilst there are challenges in providing sufficient in-house foster carers there are clear and effective priorities for children to live closer to home. As a result there has been a 9% decrease in the last 12 months of children living more than 20 miles from their home. Out of authority placements are governed by the East Midlands commissioning framework. There is a cross border protocol in place to ensure that placements meet required standards. Standards within the Local Authority's own children's homes are improving with nine of the 13 Local Authority children's homes judged to be good or better overall (two are outstanding).
- Standards of foster care assessment and review are robust. Foster carers receive regular training that is relevant to the children they care for and participation is high. Carers are fully included in planning for children and have delegated authority in the majority of cases to make day to day decisions, such as whether children can stay overnight with friends. New foster carers receive support from mentors, who are experienced foster carers. This enhances the quality of care provided to children and young people and increases the confidence of foster carers. Foster carers generally felt that they, and the children they look after, are well supported by the fostering liaison officers and children's social workers.
- There is effective risk reducing partnership work between CAYA and the police in individual cases relating to children who are missing or absent from care. The numbers of children reported missing from home and from care has fallen. The police missing person's officer undertakes preventative work by forming links with children's homes. There are robust systems based on liaison with schools, police and MATs for identifying and locating children missing from education.
- There are effective systems for ensuring children missing from care including those placed outside the Local Authority area are visited within appropriate

timescales upon their return and any triggers or patterns for children going missing are identified and addressed. If there are concerns regarding child sexual exploitation, children missing from care are managed under child protection procedures.

- Appropriate systems are used to ensure that children placed outside of Derbyshire have suitable and timely arrangements made for their health, education and contact with their families. However, when placements are unplanned or when children have complex ongoing health or education needs, there are occasionally delays in putting services in place.
- Derbyshire has high aspirations for the educational achievements of looked after children. The Children in Care Education Service ensures that looked after children are in appropriate education settings. Most looked after children attend schools that are judged good or better by Ofsted. However, attainment outcomes for pupils in the Early Years and key stages 1, 2 and 3 are only in line with national averages for looked after children. However, 2013 results for five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics at Key Stage 4, show significant improvement over the previous year, closing the gap with all Derbyshire pupils. The recently appointed virtual head has a clear strategic view of current strengths and weaknesses; consultation is underway with headteachers to drive action planning to improve outcomes for all looked after children. Fixed term exclusions have reduced by 25% since 2010-11 and there are no permanent exclusions for looked after children during 2012-13. Effective systems are in place to ensure early warning of any potential exclusions for looked after children, and managed moves to other schools are used well for individual cases.
- The number of children who receive regular health and dental examinations fluctuates. Nearly a quarter of children looked after for more than a year in 2012-13 had not had a health or dental check. This has been identified as a priority and appropriate plans are in place to improve attendance and to reduce the age that children receive their first dental check.
- Currently there is no overview of some of the most basic information about looked after children's health, such as whether they smoke or the level of teenage pregnancy. The Local Authority and its partners are aware of this deficit and have well developed plans for systems to collect and analyse this data.
- There are good arrangements in place for health notifications for looked after children who move in and out of the county. This means that the transfer of health arrangements can be expedited and delay in continuity is minimised. Derbyshire undertakes reviews of children's health on behalf of other local authorities at the point notifications are received. It also funds specialist services for children placed out of authority if they are not part of the commissioned services in that local area.
- Children who return home from care continue to receive effective multi-agency monitoring and support that is stepped up or down appropriately, depending on children's changing needs. As a result re-admissions to care, unless as a planned programme of respite, are low.

## **The graded judgment for adoption performance is good.**

- Purposeful planning and effective oversight of children's cases mean that numbers of children leaving care through adoption have steadily increased, well above national average rates.
- Approaches to family finding are creative and include the use of national systems and collaboration with voluntary agencies and other authorities as a regional consortium. This has resulted in adoptive families being recruited from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances to address the diverse needs of children who need a permanent alternative home. Older children are being adopted in greater numbers than in comparable authorities, and more brother and sister groups are now able to remain together.
- Children whose final plan may be adoption are identified prior to their initial health assessment; the assessment undertaken is sufficiently rigorous to be used to serve as an adoption or permanence medical. As a result children are not submitted to unnecessary medical examination or delays in decision making about their future, due to a lack of medical information.
- The authority is responding well to the challenge of providing families for the greater number of children with an adoption plan. Social workers and their managers are focused on minimising delay for children. Good assessments and effective tracking of children's cases have helped achieve a steady reduction in the length of care proceedings, which is now well below the national average. As a result, the overall time taken between children's admission to care and moving in with their adoptive families is better than the national average.
- However, the time taken to match children with suitable families has increased, so that the number of children awaiting adoption has risen. This particularly affects children with more complex needs. Managers are aware of this and are planning a targeted campaign specifically to recruit more adopters for this group.
- Black and minority ethnic children are less likely than their peers to leave care through adoption, although numbers overall are small and Derbyshire has narrowed the gap to a smaller difference than the national average.
- Support for adopted children and their families is generally good, although support plans are not always well documented in children's records. Adoptive parents reported that their children were doing well. The large majority of adopters spoken to are aware of how to get help if they need it. Most hold the service in high regard, even when they had encountered difficulties. One parent told inspectors 'we have had an amazing experience with Derbyshire. From the very first moment they were open and honest with us, so we knew what to expect.'
- The adoption panel reported that as greater numbers of children are being adopted there have been increasing demands for support. Consequently, a strategy has been developed with emphasis on family finding and assessment to ensure that prospective adopters understand the demands they will face and services available to support them. The range of services is being further

developed and incorporates specific individualised packages as well as the use of early help and multi-agency teams. A 'duty' system of adoption social workers within the support team ensures a timely response to adopters.

- The Adoption Panel chairs meet regularly with the authority and provide appropriate support and challenge. For example, they have highlighted issues about report writing and the need to ensure adequate resources for adoption support and regularly give feedback to social workers about the quality of their assessments, plans and reports for children.
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters have been strengthened in response to greater numbers of children in care for whom an adoption plan is made, with additional social worker posts created in the adoption team. As a result there has been an increase in the number and diversity of approved adopters. Nearly all adopters spoken to were positive about the recruitment and assessment process. However, the overall number of children who are waiting for a family remains high (86 at the end October 2013) and the authority recognises that some children with complex needs are waiting too long before moving in with an adoptive family. In response it has plans for a targeted recruitment campaign and to commission additional external support to address this shortfall.
- In the majority of cases sampled, children had benefited from good support from social workers and other staff who took time to work with them, including providing life story work. Furthermore, letterbox contact arrangements enable adoptive families to exchange news with children's birth families where this is part of the agreed plan for the child.

### **The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of Care Leavers is good**

- Most Care Leavers are positive about the support they receive. Those who spoke with the inspector were clear that considerable support is offered to them and that staff were readily available to help them develop their independence. Relationships between Care Leavers and workers from the commissioned service provider, Barnardos, are particularly strong. Care Leavers recounted how key workers had ensured accommodation was appropriate, and the allocation of setting up home allowances was available to them and, where appropriate, higher education bursaries. Several noted the guidance they had received to gain employment or apprenticeships.
- Case file scrutiny confirmed that Care Leavers' support is available, effective and often achieves very positive outcomes. However, support for Care Leavers to manage their health and promote healthy living is not consistently available or effective. Most current Care Leavers have not been provided with a copy of their health history. However, action has been taken to address this. The designated nurse for looked after children has consulted Care Leavers about their health information. Care Leavers had no concerns about their health and all had been reminded to register with general practitioners and dentists.



- A good range of accommodation and support ensures that young people leaving care have a real choice about their living arrangements. This includes the 'Staying Put' programme through which Care Leavers can remain with their foster carers after they reach 18.
- Effective support from key workers helps young people to live safely and they know with whom they should speak if they have problems with their accommodation. Young people who spoke with the inspector feel safe in their accommodation and were able to highlight instances where key workers had supported them with specific accommodation issues. Strong and developing partnerships with housing associations means that the range of accommodation options is increasing.
- A good number of Care Leavers are supported into further and higher education. Additionally, for future Care Leavers, the Uni-fi project is working well to increase the aspirations of younger children in care. The virtual school is piloting a personal education plan to support young people in their options for education and training post 16. Appropriate financial support is made available to Care Leavers in order to help them continue in education. This includes support available during university vacations where needed. Currently, there are 25 Care Leavers studying at university.
- The current format for pathway plans, (developed by Barnardos, following consultation with young people) is very comprehensive and won an award for clarity, the Care2Work quality mark 2013. There are some excellent examples of plans which demonstrate strong engagement with young people and identify clear targets and actions. The best plans show very effective and focused solutions for individual issues and practical, realistic targets for the young person and support worker. Pathway planning for Care Leavers aged eighteen and over is consistently good. However, this is not always the case for some younger people on their approach to leaving care; the quality of pathway planning is varied and consequently effective planning for the transition to adulthood is not as evident for some young people.
- The Local Authority has been very effective in developing employment, education and training for Care Leavers. This improvement has meant that the number of Care Leavers who are not in education, employment or training, has declined significantly over time. Care Leavers in education, employment or training shows an improving trend from 76% in 2010 to 82% in 2012, which was substantially better than national averages or statistical neighbours. The performance for 2013 to date shows a dip to 74%, but this is still well above the national average.
- The Local Authority has gained an award for its Care Leaver Employment Project and is currently supporting 14 apprentices working for private companies and a further five working directly for the Local Authority.
- Consultation with Care Leavers resulted in a Care Leavers Charter. A DVD was developed following the consultation and presented by Care Leavers to ministers and the Corporate Parenting Committee. It is also used in training events for workers.

## **Leadership, management and governance are good**

- The determined commitment of the Local Authority has led to the improvement of services for children and young people. The council has a good understanding of its strengths and weakness and how these impact on service delivery. Elected members and partners have high aspirations and set ambitious targets for improving services for children, which are delivered through robust planning processes.
- The Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the senior management team have been successful in creating a culture of learning, support and challenge within Derbyshire's children and young people's services. All leaders have a strong presence within frontline services, making regular visits to teams and ensuring that they meet with children and young people to inform and evaluate practice. In addition, corporate parenting extends to the wider council functions, resulting, for example, in a number of high quality apprenticeships being made available to Care Leavers.
- Derbyshire is an innovative Local Authority, demonstrating its commitment to children, young people and families through its investment in staff to ensure a better qualified workforce. An effective workforce strategy is in place, ensuring the workforce is proportionate and affordable with the right skills and knowledge. Human Resource (HR) and senior managers have successfully addressed performance management, leadership succession planning and introduced 'My Plans'. Capacity within social work teams across the county has increased. The Local Authority is committed to further improving outcomes for children through the use of systemic practice across frontline teams and the social pedagogy model within residential care. This is already having a positive impact on outcomes for children. For example, the social pedagogy model has resulted in reductions in the need for restraint and a reduction in the numbers of children missing education. It has also been effective in improving staff morale and reducing sickness levels.
- The council and its partners make good use of external and internal scrutiny and have recently been assessed and awarded Customer Service Excellence for the MATs. Partnerships and collaborative working have been promoted through Senior managers' introduction of district 'Challenge Days'. The challenge days included police and health representatives, and have led to changes to practice and procedures, as well as the introduction of 'ten service priorities'. For example, one district's 'step up step down' arrangements were identified as good practice and subsequently have been endorsed across the county to ensure children and young people receive the appropriate level of service.
- The Local Authority continues to review its approach to delivering services in response both to local analysis and national initiatives. It is, for example, currently reviewing its 'Call Derbyshire' service and is working towards the implementation of a single assessment process. The recent appointment of a 'Principal Social Worker' has increased management and supervisory capacity, and enhanced the quality of professional practice through supporting staff in

systemic practice, developing reflective supervision skills for senior practitioners and linking practice to senior management. Group supervision observed by inspectors showed tools from systemic training being used effectively to enhance work with children and their families.

- Most of the key recommendations from the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in 2011 have been successfully implemented although some, such as the recording of management decisions and effective use of chronologies, remain as work in progress.
- The Children's Trust, the Performance Improvement Board and locality planning and commissioning partnerships provide effective and joined up leadership for children's services. Clear accountabilities and responsibilities exist between senior officers, the lead member and the Chair of the DSCB. Robust commissioning is informed by a comprehensive joint strategic needs assessment, with effective engagement of statutory and voluntary sectors and clinical commissioning groups. Detailed information and analysis on areas of high deprivation and vulnerable children is used flexibly and effectively to inform the allocation of resources and service delivery. There is a strong emphasis on user involvement to shape services. For example, young people were consulted to help shape the specifications for new care leaver accommodation. Users are not, however, fully engaged in evaluating and improving child protection services.
- Case files are regularly audited by managers at all levels to ensure the quality of practice and services. However, the learning from these audits is not collated or disseminated through strategic partnerships or to staff. This limits the authority's ability to improve services as a result of case auditing.
- The Local Authority's positive partnership working ensures a strong multi-agency approach to planning and delivering services to meet the needs of children, young people and families in Derbyshire. The secondment of six police sergeants to the role of MAT manager illustrates the commitment to pooling resources, partnership working, developing effective working relationships and enhancing professional understanding of roles.
- Newly qualified social workers receive good support which includes induction training, protected caseloads and shadowing experienced colleagues. In-house training is comprehensive with high rates of staff attendance. Staff are motivated and enthusiastic about working for Derbyshire, which is reflected in their commitment to, and the quality of, direct work with children.
- Performance management and quality assurance arrangements are well established, with good reporting to the Children's Trust, DSCB and to individual teams through the line management structure. Staff are regularly consulted on policies, development and improvement plans. A culture of continuous challenge and improvement is evident throughout services.
- Effective oversight by the Chief Executive of the DSCB has not yet been fully embedded. An independent audit of the DSCB in January 2013 identified that the

DSCB annual report and business plan were not reported to the Chief Executive or lead member of the Council. The DSCB Annual Report for 2012-13 had been recently published at the time of the inspection but the 2013/14 Business Plan had not yet been published. It is acknowledged though that the priorities had been agreed by the Board but good practice would have been to publish the Annual report and Business Plan earlier and at the same time.

## What the inspection judgements mean: the local authority

An **outstanding** local authority leads highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** local authority leads effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and those who are looked after and care leavers have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a local authority that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the authority is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children, young people and families.

A local authority that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after or care leavers not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## **Section 2: The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board**

### **The effectiveness of the LSCB requires improvement**

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensure that the DSCB membership fully meets the requirements of Working Together 2013.
- Increase the influence of the Board by strengthening the relationships with other key strategic groups, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Local Safeguarding Adults Board.
- Ensure the work of the Board is informed by clear agreed priorities and an up to date and well-structured business plan.
- Improve its oversight of strategic work to protect children at risk of going missing and of sexual exploitation.
- Analyse and use the findings from case file audits in order to drive improvement.
- Ensure the Board is effectively monitoring arrangements to safeguard children placed in Derbyshire by other local authorities.
- Establish processes that ensure the experiences of children, young people and families inform service improvement and training.

#### **Key strengths and weaknesses of the LSCB**

- The recent appointment of a new, experienced Independent Chair to the DSCB has improved partner engagement with the work of the Board, and led to more robust governance arrangements. The Annual Report for 2012-13 has now been published but the DSCB business plan for 2013/14 has only recently been agreed. This means that the work of the Board has not been underpinned by clearly identified shared priorities. A threshold document has been re-launched and partners are well engaged with safeguarding training.
- Although DSCB members are sufficiently senior and able to commit their agency to provide resources, not all partner agencies regularly attend the DSCB. For example, there is insufficient engagement from district and borough councils and further education. This limits the ability of the Board to influence and hold to account these agencies.

- The DSCB has no lay members, which weakens its ability to develop public and community engagement. The DSCB has recognised this and are looking to recruit two representatives to become independent board members.
- An independently commissioned audit of the work of the DSCB has identified several areas for improvement. An action plan has been developed to address these.
- Links with the Children’s Trust are established with regular attendance by the DSCB Chair. However, links with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Safeguarding Adult Board are not yet defined or embedded, with no formal protocol in place to drive improvement.
- The new Independent Chair has established a culture of accountability and challenge. Section 11 audits have been completed, with themes identified and actions taken. Plans to monitor and evaluate the quality of multi-agency frontline practice, including early help, are in place. However, as implementation is at an early stage, these plans are not yet leading to service improvements. Furthermore, current processes do not ensure that the experiences of children, young people and families inform service improvement or training programmes.
- Learning from a recent Serious Case Review (SCR) has highlighted failings in some adult agencies’ understanding of, and compliance with, child protection procedures which had not previously been identified or addressed by the Board. A robust action plan has now been put in place to address these shortcomings.
- Learning from this and other SCRs has been comprehensively disseminated to staff across children’s services and partner agencies. An example is the distribution of posters, leaflets and mouse mats promoting lessons learnt and the ‘Think Family’ charter launched at a multi-agency conference. The DSCB has also developed an e-learning package which focuses on lessons learnt from SCRs.
- Practice to identify and support children at risk of sexual exploitation is good. However, there is no formal child sexual exploitation (CSE) strategic overview of patterns and trends in relation to children at risk of sexual exploitation. As a result the DSCB does not have a clear understanding of the numbers and circumstances of children and young people in Derbyshire who are at risk of CSE.
- Systems to monitor the safeguarding of children placed in Derbyshire by other local authorities are underdeveloped. As a result the DSCB is not able to identify concerns or promote improvements in practice which lead to improved safeguarding of these children.

## What the inspection judgments mean: the LSCB

An **outstanding** LSCB is highly influential in improving the care and protection of children. Their evaluation of performance is exceptional and helps the local authority and its partners to understand the difference that services make and where they need to improve. The LSCB creates and fosters an effective learning culture.

An LSCB that is **good** coordinates the activity of statutory partners and monitors the effectiveness of local arrangements. Multi-agency training in the protection and care of children is effective and evaluated regularly for impact. The LSCB provides robust and rigorous evaluation and analysis of local performance that identifies areas for improvement and influences the planning and delivery of high-quality services.

An LSCB **requires improvement** if it does not yet demonstrate the characteristics of good.

An LSCB that is **inadequate** does not demonstrate that it has effective arrangements in place and the required skills to discharge its statutory functions. It does not understand the experiences of children and young people locally and fails to identify where improvements can be made.



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