

Hartlepool Borough 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 Board¹

Inspection date: 19 November 2013 – 11 December 2013

<p>The overall judgement is good.</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>	
1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Good

<p>The judgement for the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is requires improvement</p> <p>The LSCB is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of good.</p>

¹ 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

- Children, young people and their families can easily access good early help in their local community when difficulties begin to emerge. This helps children and young people's circumstances improve. When children and young people need help and protection, professional staff who know them already work well together to ensure they are kept safe and well.
- When staff who work for different services in Hartlepool, such as schools and children's centres, are worried about a child, they can easily refer them to children's social care for an assessment of their needs. Timely and responsive assessments consider all aspects of a child's situation in the large majority of cases and lead to good planned work that manages and reduces risks.
- Children and young people are regularly asked whether things are improving or getting worse. Those who need a social worker report good relationships with them, and feel listened to and understood. Children in need of help and protection receive regular visits from their social workers who spend a good amount of time with them working effectively.
- Agencies work hard to tackle domestic abuse. Where domestic abuse does occur, agencies visit families quickly, and offer good quality help, which reduces risks for the children, young people and adults involved.
- When young people aged 16 or 17 find themselves at risk of homelessness, there are good arrangements to provide them with support, including suitable accommodation if this is required.
- Children and young people only become looked after by the council if it is in their best interests to do so. The Council is good at ensuring that enough skilled foster carers and adopters are found. In the case of recruiting sufficient foster carers they demonstrate very good performance. Children who are looked after and then leave care, often have the same social worker for many years. They told inspectors that this helps them as their social worker knows their history, what they are like, and what help they need. Children and young people looked after contribute routinely to their looked after reviews. However, further work is needed to ensure more attend and participate in person.
- When children and young people need the courts to make decisions about where and who they should live with, including when they need a care order, the council ensures this happens very quickly. This is achieved by working well with the courts, lawyers, and the Children and Family Court Advisory Service (Cafcass). As a result, magistrates and judges can make the right decisions for the child or young person, enabling them to move as quickly as possible to their new permanent home.

- Children for whom the best plan is to be adopted, are found good adoptive families quickly and not left to drift in temporary homes. Children are not separated from their brothers or sisters, unless this is the best thing for each of them. A specialist and dedicated worker completes good quality assessments prior to making decisions as to whether brothers and sisters are separated. Birth parents are supported to make a good contribution to their children settling in with adoptive parents. Adoptive families are given excellent support to help them settle down together.
- Looked after children achieve well. Collective good work by the virtual headteacher and schools is helping to drive improvement successfully. In 2013, all pupils made good progress from their starting points on entry into care. Pupils attending primary schools are making particularly good progress from their often very low starting points. Children and young people are fully involved in the development of their personal education plans so have agreed to, and know, what their individual goals are.
- Young people leaving care have a good choice of accommodation and are well prepared for their move into independence. Some of them were very involved in the design of independent supported accommodation specifically for care leavers, and this meets their needs well. Those who want to stay with their foster carers after the age of 18 can do so if they so wish. The Council has earmarked four apprenticeships for care leavers, and the number is about to increase by a further two places.
- Children and young people with disabilities, and their families, benefit from a single social work team which supports them from the age of 0-25. This is a very good way of working as it means they don't have to change workers when they become 18. The Throughcare Team work hard to build positive and long lasting relationships with young people leaving care, who value these relationships.
- Looked after children and care leavers have good champions in the 'Children in Care Council' (CiCC). They are listened to and have influenced several things that matter to looked after children and care leavers. A good example of this is their successful lobbying for an increase in the leaving care grant.
- Senior managers in the Council and elected councillors work well together so that at a time when budgets are being reduced and are under a lot of pressure, services for vulnerable children, young people and their families are being protected as far as possible.

What does the Local Authority need to improve?

Areas for improvement

- Social workers need to ensure that the rich knowledge of the children they work with is reflected in case records.
- Social workers must be supported by managers in supervision to 'think the unthinkable' at all times so that the experiences and views of both children and parents are equally understood and considered in decisions about risks and next steps.
- Social workers should, in every case, assess the risks and use complete chronologies more effectively to consider and take account of the family history, including recent events.
- Children's participation in the arrangements to protect them should be well supported, and monitored by managers.
- Managers need to ensure that the views of children, young people and their families are used more regularly to influence service developments and improve existing services.
- Accelerate progress in implementing the management improvement plan to further raise practice standards and more effectively quality assure key aspects of social work practice.
- Child protection conference chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) must improve their practice in questioning the quality and content of assessments and plans for children. They must challenge social workers to clearly set out (in key documents) what a child thinks about their situation, and what they would like to see happen to improve things. The recording of children's wishes should be clearly documented.
- Implement the child sexual exploitation strategy and screening tool so that early identification of those at risk is effective, routine and systematic.
- Promote police attendance at child protection strategy meetings routinely, so that in every case the most recent information can be shared, understood and used to plan the most effective protective actions.
- Ensure the 'Throughcare Team' develop more effective ways of understanding and describing the impact of their work. The use and regular review of clear targets in pathway action plans should show the difference the actions have made. They should also ensure that care leavers are routinely provided with information about their legal entitlements.
- Further increase the proportion of young people moving into education, employment, training or university.

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 who 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 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: Lynn Radley

Team inspectors: Sheena Doyle, Tracey Metcalfe, Ali Mekki, Margaret Farrow, Rob Hackeson, Dominic Stevens, John Gregg.

Information about this Local Authority area²

Children living in this area

- Approximately 20,370 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Hartlepool. This is 22.1% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 31% of the Local Authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 26.7% (the national average is 18.1%)
 - in secondary schools is 22.9% (the national average is 15.1%)
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 4.2% of all children living in the area.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area is Asian (1.9%).
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 3.6% (the national average is 18%).
 - in secondary schools is 2.7% (the national average is 13.6%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31 October 2013, 1165 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 1033 at 31 October 2012.
- At 31 October 2013, 129 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 103 at 31 October 2012.
- At 31 October 2013, 1 child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is unchanged from 31 October 2012.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 October 2013, 205 children are being looked after by the Local Authority (a rate of 96 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 189 (87 per 10,000 children) at 31 October 2012.
 - Of this number 60 (or 29%) live outside the Local Authority area
 - 3 live in residential children's homes, of whom 2 live out of the Authority area

² 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.

- 3 live in residential special schools³, all of whom are out of the Authority area
 - 185 live with foster families, of whom 21% live out of the authority area
 - 2 live with parents, none of whom live out of the authority area
 - 1 child is an unaccompanied asylum-seeker.
- In the last 12 months there have been:
- 7 adoptions
 - 6 children became subject of special guardianship orders
 - 73 children who have ceased to be looked after, of whom 4% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 1 young person has ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - No young people who have ceased to be looked after live in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The Local Authority operates one children’s home. It was judged to be good in its most recent Ofsted inspection.
 - The previous inspection of Hartlepool’s safeguarding arrangements was in June 2010. The Local Authority was judged to be good.
 - The previous inspection of Hartlepool’s services for looked after children was in June 2010. The Local Authority was judged to be good.
 - The previous inspection of Hartlepool’s adoption service was in January 2012. The service was judged to be satisfactory.
- The previous inspection of Hartlepool’s fostering service was in August 2012. The service was judged to be good.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since 21 October 2013.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board has been vacant since October 2013 with the previous chair having been in post since May 2011. The position is currently being recruited to.

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for fewer than 295 days.

Inspection judgements about the Local Authority

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection is good

- Agencies in the area work well together to provide effective early help to children and their families. The common assessment framework (CAF) is used well to assess the needs of children, young people and their families and agree which services should be offered before their problems become serious enough to require help from children's social care. CAF completion rates continue to increase and so more families are benefiting from earlier coordinated help.
- Parents and families are positive about the help they receive. They can describe the difference it is making to their own skills and confidence, and how it is improving their relationships with their children.
- Locality based multi-agency teams provide effective and prompt support to children and their families. These teams are a key part of good quality early help and intervention services. This approach is helping to reduce risks to families who are experiencing difficulties, for example, domestic violence with the co-location of a specialist voluntary organisation 'Harbour' with police and health staff. A good range of services are provided, such as counselling and work with perpetrators of violence. This is encouraging more families to come forward for help.
- Partner agencies are positive about the 'First Contact and Support Hub', where they receive prompt advice from a qualified social worker or team manager if they have concerns about a child. Where concerns escalate and early intervention help is no longer sufficiently effective, children are appropriately referred to social care. Thresholds for statutory services are well understood, so referrals received by the initial response social work team (IRT) are appropriate and lead to an assessment of the child's circumstances by a social worker.
- Social workers effectively use a range of recognised assessment tools to identify risks and needs of individual children in the vast majority of cases. Regular reviews of cases ensure implementation of thresholds is robust and evidences good management oversight. The 'Graded Care Profile' assessment tool, which measures levels of neglect, is being used in some cases. However, it is not yet used routinely enough to have a definitive impact.
- Effective decision making and management oversight ensures cases that need further statutory work, or less support through community based services, are transferred promptly. Appropriate priority is given to the individual needs of children and their families.
- Support provided by family service teams aligns directly to assessed needs, is not time-limited and provides a wrap around intensive support to families where children are subject to plans. This demonstrates good practice.

- In a very few cases there is an over-reliance on the parents version of events, such as reporting a reduction in their drug use or minimising the impact of neglect. Social workers, in every case, need to comprehensively consider and take account of the full impact of parental behaviour. The Local Authority is aware of this and work has already started. Well-focussed arrangements are in place to achieve early improvements. For example, where deficits are identified, robust management action is taken to deal with responsible staff, and cases are reviewed and reallocated. Action to protect the child is prioritised and taken immediately.
- Children and young people who need help and protection are seen and assessed promptly by qualified social workers. Assessments are completed in a timely way and the vast majority demonstrate good analysis of children and families' circumstances and needs.
- Chronologies are not used effectively in all cases, but are present and up to date on most children's files. Some chronologies contain too much detail making it harder to assess and understand what is happening for children and the risks associated with their circumstances. Case recording of activity, communications, visits and decision making is generally good and up to date, and includes the rationale for decisions made. Children are seen and seen alone by social workers, where they are of sufficient age and this is appropriate.
- Children's views are not always explicitly recorded in child in need plans. However, the plans are used appropriately for children who need targeted services but who do not require a child protection plan. The plans facilitate good multi-agency support for the child and their family. In most cases, plans appropriately focus on improving outcomes and reducing risk for children. Regular review of plans avoids drift and ensures progress is maintained.
- Where a child is at risk of significant harm, the response from children's social care services in the vast majority of cases is effective, timely and well managed. Appropriate immediate action is taken to protect children and young people. Routine and effective strategy discussions are held with the police prior to a child protection investigation. Following initial enquires, the help and protection that children receive is well-coordinated and proportionate to risks, needs and circumstances and led by qualified social workers.
- Strategy meetings are effective and recorded comprehensively in almost all cases. They are used well to share information between agencies. The police provide written information in all cases, but do not routinely attend. If they do not attend, the most recent information may not be available. In one case, detailed information about the bail conditions for a young person recently released from secure accommodation was not communicated clearly. This meant that the social worker was unclear how to plan effectively to reduce risks.
- An effective out of hour's social work services is jointly commissioned by Hartlepool and neighbouring authorities. Good communication between the

out of hours and day time services ensures families receive a seamless service with all emergency activity followed up promptly.

- Initial child protection conferences are held swiftly following child protection enquiries but do not routinely include the children or young people who are being considered. Although social workers demonstrate a deep knowledge of children they work with, and the quality of discussion and reports is good, the actual voice of a child could offer power and immediacy to professional deliberations. Children's views are sought and represented verbally by social workers. Conference chairs do not routinely challenge the lack of a distinct child's voice being recorded in assessments or the lack of using advocacy.
- All children who need a child protection plan, have one. Case conferences develop good outline plans that are progressed by subsequent core groups. The vast majority of review child protection conferences are held within timescales and managers robustly scrutinise the small number which are not.
- Most child protection plans are effective tools for setting out and monitoring how risks are being managed and reduced. However, a small number of plans are too generalised and are not sufficiently specific about the exact steps to be taken to reduce a particular risk. Managers have completed substantial work to raise standards in this area of practice.
- Child protection plans are regularly reviewed and updated, setting out where risk and protective factors have increased or decreased. However, child protection conference and review chairs do not routinely challenge social workers to improve the quality of plans where it is required. Children who are subject to plans experience improved outcomes and close monitoring of their progress. This ensures alternative actions are taken when necessary. Core groups meet regularly and are well-attended by professionals and family members.
- Unborn children are well protected, with prompt referrals to children's social care where historical and/or current concerns indicate the need for an assessment. Good quality pre-birth assessments include putative fathers, and lead to timely plans. New born infants, who cannot be cared for safely by their parents, are moved swiftly to alternative carers. Concurrent rehabilitation and alternative plans add to timely decision-making about their future. This ensures they spend minimum time with alternative carers before achieving permanence.
- Children and young people told inspectors they feel safe and listened to. They like their social workers and have good relationships with them. Parents also described positive relationships with social workers. They were clear about the social worker's role, particularly in child protection, described good levels of engagement and felt they were treated fairly and given every opportunity to improve. Equally, social workers clearly articulated the wishes, feelings and needs of the children and young people they work with, and how this good quality engagement was informing assessments and plans. More needs to be done to ensure the richness of this knowledge is clearly evident in all case records.

- To increase the participation of children and young people in meetings that concern them, the Local Authority has commissioned an independent advocacy agency. This will provide support from January 2014. Currently, parents and families are routinely asked for their views about the services they have received from children's social care and how they experience child protection conferences. Reports prepared by social workers and other professionals for child protection conferences are appropriately shared with families beforehand.
- Good quality work is undertaken in high risk domestic abuse situations within the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference arrangements (MARAC). Referrals to MARAC are appropriate and timely. The majority of victims referred to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) accept help. Effective, good quality services for children and their families are well established. Families are visited on the day of the referral in most cases.
- Arrangements for identifying and tracking children and young people missing from home, care and education are good with robust monitoring of the completion of follow up interviews. All children missing from education, either as a result of medical need, being home-educated, or excluded, are closely tracked and offered appropriate services. All home-educated children are visited at least annually. This ensures they are safe and appropriately educated. Attendance rates for children looked after are above average and exclusion rates below that of the whole school population in Hartlepool. There has been a two thirds reduction in the number of children attending alternative provision in the past two years. Rigorous monitoring ensures they receive their full entitlement to a good quality education. Good partnerships with schools ensures that pregnant and young mothers are able to sustain education in their chosen schools.
- The recently constituted Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked group (VEMT) considers issues both strategically and operationally to identify and support children at risk. This positive development implemented by the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board replaces a single issue 'Missing' group. The lack of sustained leadership of the Board means it is not yet having the impact necessary on frontline services. Systematic and/or discrete work in the identification of, and interventions with young people at risk of/or being sexually exploited, is at an early stage. For example, a screening tool to assess whether young people may be at risk of child sexual exploitation is not yet in place in frontline teams.
- No significant or organised exploitative activity has been identified in Hartlepool at present. Where a potential or actual risk of sexual exploitation is identified, cases are dealt with individually and risk is well managed using child protection processes. Clear links and joint working, between the Hartlepool VEMT group and the Tees-wide VEMT group, is a strength. It results in improved information-sharing across Local Authority boundaries. Good tracking and monitoring of perpetrators in individual cases has led to disruption of perpetrators in Hartlepool as a direct result of the work of VEMT.

- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements are well embedded and robust. Good working relationships with schools, police and the council's human resources department ensures each case is effectively dealt with. This is supported by routine reporting to the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) and appropriate action being taken where necessary.
- When 16 and 17 year olds present as potentially homeless, their needs are assessed promptly and they are offered services including suitable accommodation. The use of Section 20 accommodation is considered in each case and is implemented when necessary.
- A good, community wide private fostering awareness raising strategy is in place. One child is currently privately fostered, following a timely and appropriate assessment of their needs and situation. Case records demonstrate staff are suitably alert to a range of situations where private fostering may be an issue.
- Good practice and attention is paid to children and families' individual characteristics and differences. For example, services for travelling children led to improved outcomes; services for a Polish child in need considered his cultural and other needs well; and parents with learning disabilities were well supported by advocates during child protection processes.

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

- Decisions about children becoming looked after are appropriate, proportionate to the needs and risks identified, and consistently applied. Management oversight of cases is good with decisions made or ratified by the care planning panel. The 'edge of care' service provides good support to families and is safely supporting children and young people who would otherwise have to be looked after.
- The numbers looked after in Hartlepool are high compared with similar councils and have continued to rise this year. Whilst the council are successfully reducing the numbers of children becoming looked after or requiring care, the numbers of those leaving care is smaller. In particular, this relates to young people becoming looked after as adolescents who the council successfully stabilise in settled foster care and support them well through to independence. The council's medium to long term strategy for reducing total numbers is to increase their efforts in early intervention combined with robust and timely permanence planning.
- Looked after children have their own discrete teams and are managed separately from those for children in need of help and protection. This allows social workers, managers and associated services to focus exclusively on the needs of those looked after and in need of permanence.
- Good collaboration with Children and Family Court's Advisory Service (Cafcass) and the courts, for example, through the Local Family Justice Board, is reducing delay in court proceedings. This has resulted in an above average performance on the time taken to complete care proceedings. The Hartlepool average is 34 weeks compared to a national average of 46 weeks. Effective use of the Public Law Outline ensures that alternative options are thoroughly explored before proceedings. Good arrangements are in place through regular supervision, child protection reviews and performance clinics which ensure the vast majority of cases progress without delay.
- Looked after children see their social workers frequently. Case records and review documentation evidence confirms that visits to children exceed minimum statutory requirements, and that social workers know them well. Good direct work by social workers and foster carers helps children to express their wishes and feelings and contribute to decisions about their future. In cases tracked, bullying was not a cause for concern. Professionals are alert to the risk of bullying among vulnerable young people.
- Arrangements to meet children's health needs are good. The looked after children (LAC) nurse, based with the throughcare team, is available to talk to children and care leavers, who visit the office or use the drop-in facility, and refers them to specialist health services as necessary. Young people said they value this service. A very high proportion of children have their annual health assessments and dental checks completed on time, and immunisations are up-

to-date. Strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are completed for all children. This helps to assess their emotional well-being. Those aged 14-16 can use self-reporting SDQs to contribute to their assessments and plans.

- Dedicated staff in the multi-disciplinary placement support and therapeutic team provide a broad range of interventions to help children with their emotional well-being. There are many examples of these contributing to good outcomes such as building resilience, improved progress socially and academically, and contributing to stable placements. Placement stability is consistently good with performance well above the England average on both short-term and long-term measures. Overall, children live in the right place for them and young people spoken to say they are happy and satisfied with where they stay. Matching children with carers is effective. For some young people, several options are considered before they move into a foster care placement or residential home.
- Good and improving work by the virtual school team is helping to drive improvement in the attainment and progress of children looked after successfully. All Year 6 looked after pupils who left key Stage 2 in summer 2013 made the progress expected for their age when taking into account their starting points. This is a greater rate of progress than that of all pupils nationally. Test results in 2013 in English and mathematics were well above similar pupils nationally. The gap between their results and the average for all pupils nationally has reduced well since 2012. All children looked after made good progress particularly considering their often very low skills and abilities on entry into care.
- Improvement in the proportion of Year 11 looked after children gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics has been impressive. Provisional information indicates 42.9 per cent gained these qualifications which is a 28 per cent improvement on the previous year. Current Year 11 students are on track to continue this improvement.
- The virtual school team track pupil's progress half termly. This information informs termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews. This is above statutory requirements and is good practice. Additional support, including one to one support, is provided to help pupils catch up. The majority of PEPs reviewed were good and some were exemplary. In the best cases, pupil's progress was mapped meticulously throughout their time in care. Examples of pupils' work and an array of photographs showcased their achievements over time. In these, it is clear that young people have contributed to their reviews well.
- Rigorous challenge to schools about the progress pupils make, the quality of PEPs and the school's use of the pupil premium, is contributing to good improvement in their achievements, and to the quality and usefulness of PEPs.
- Careful consideration of the best place for young people to be educated is taken before they are found carers. This has helped to ensure the number of young people who change schools is low and they are only moved when it is in their best interests to do so.

- Good collaborative work with the virtual school, behaviour and attendance team, education welfare officers and schools, is helping to ensure good attendance rates for children looked after. Behaviour and attendance rates are above average for similar groups and for all pupils in Hartlepool. Urgent action is taken when children are missing from school and the high attendance rates pay testament to the positive impact of such work.
- Very few looked after children are excluded from school on a temporary basis. There have been no permanent exclusions since 2006. Only two pupils attend alternative provision and these are monitored closely by the virtual school. There are robust arrangements to ensure children educated in schools outside Hartlepool are able to access good quality education. All pupils are placed in provision judged to be at least good as a result of their most recent Ofsted inspection. The virtual school team check their attainment and progress regularly, in the same way as pupils educated within Hartlepool schools.
- Education staff visit children educated in residential school provision at least twice yearly. They check that the pupils are safe and achieving well; taking action if there is any risk. The quality of advice and support from both education and social care staff, as well as the high quality PEP, was praised by a headteacher who spoke to inspectors.
- The council has a good track record of finding families and matching them to children's assessed needs. Almost all looked after children live in or near to Hartlepool, and almost all live in families. The council's fostering service is highly effective in recruiting, training and supporting foster carers and continues to increase the number of carers. In most cases it is able to provide well matched and well supported placements for children who become looked after including keeping them with their brothers and sisters. Contact with family members is child-centred and well facilitated.
- Hartlepool place very few children at a distance from their own area. Cases are comprehensively considered by senior managers prior to the making of such placements. Management oversight of the process is good. All cases are considered and reviewed by a multi-agency commissioned placements panel. Young people and their parents said the placements they are in are the right ones. Parents and family members are well supported to keep in regular contact with their children and one mother was particularly proud of the educational progress her son had made.
- Providers report good levels of communication, regular visits and support from Hartlepool staff. Good commissioning and clear contracts require those who provide placements for young people outside of Hartlepool to meet their health and education needs swiftly and promote contact. Providers must send monthly progress reports to both the child's social worker and their independent reviewing officer (IRO).
- Good action is taken to find permanent placements for children and young people. The family finder has already had a significant impact on the quality of matching since starting work in May 2013. Matches are agreed at the family

placement panel which sets a high standard for the quality of reports presented.

- All children looked after have an up to date care plan which is reviewed regularly. Plans are improving, they are generally of good quality and are subject to routine management oversight. Some plans would benefit from more detailed recording of exactly how outcomes will be achieved. Despite this, looked after children progress well, enjoying good levels of stability. They do not suffer delays in finding permanence or making progress in education. Prior to the inspection, Council case file audits identified this as an area for further work. Monthly performance clinics enable managers to track progress and take any further remedial action.
- Children's views are well represented in their looked after reviews. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) routinely see children before the meeting to gather their thoughts and feelings. When appropriate, children and young people choose whether they wish to attend their review meeting. However, the council acknowledge that it needs to look at ways of encouraging and enabling more children and young people to contribute directly. Professionals and carers do ensure children's views are taken into account in review meetings. However, it is clear that their presence and own words would add value and immediacy.
- IROs have manageable caseloads and monitor children's progress at the midpoint between reviews through discussions with their social worker. They challenge and use the dispute resolution protocol. However, the extent and effectiveness of challenge is not currently collated or reported. Overall, the quality assurance function of the IRO service is underdeveloped. The recording of children's reviews and decisions made varies in quality. There are some delays in formally writing up reviews, but this does not impact on the progress children make within the care system. Agencies and carers work from recommendations made at review meetings and actions are progressed in a timely way. Looked after children in Hartlepool benefit from positive outcomes and early placement in stable alternative permanent families. The IRO service development plan demonstrates the progress made to raise practice standards, although much of this work is at an early stage.
- Case recording for looked after children is up to date and some is very good. However, in some cases, the quality is variable and does not reflect the sensitive, child focussed and skilled direct work which social workers describe in great detail when spoken to. Significant events in some chronologies are not easily recognised amongst less relevant material, making it difficult to understand the child's 'journey'. Managers are aware that producing a succinct chronology is an onerous task within the electronic recording system. However, where chronologies are required for a specific purpose, such as those to inform court proceedings or case reviews, they are of good quality. They provide an effective account of a child's situation and history. Again,

when spoken to, social workers and IROs know very detailed information on the course and nature of an individual child's journey.

- The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is represented on the corporate parent forum and meets regularly with senior officers and councillors. Recent achievements include producing a revised version of 'the Pledge' and advising IROs about how to help young people who become looked after understand what they do. This has led to the information about the IROs being included in the 'welcome pack', a resource for children telling them about their rights and entitlements. While members of the CiCC are enthusiastic and knowledgeable, the numbers involved are relatively small and it is actively working to increase its membership to provide wider representation.
- The 0-25 year service for children with disabilities enables young people to keep their social worker beyond the age when they move from receiving children's services. This significantly smooths transition arrangements for young people and their families regarding their accommodation, training, employment, health and social care needs. It ensures that planning starts at a much younger age, leading to bespoke packages of care where required. Looked after reviews for children with disabilities are held jointly with care coordination meetings. This improves planning and reduces the number of meetings children and families have to attend.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is good

- Adoption performance in Hartlepool is good. Performance on the adoption scorecard is better than the England average for all indicators. Children live with their adopters quickly. Time between a child coming into care and moving to its adoptive family where appropriate is much shorter than most other authorities.
- Adoption placements are considered for all children where this is in their best interests. However, there is a shortage of adopters locally who can accommodate large sibling groups and children with significant additional needs, which is in line with the national picture. The decision to separate siblings is subject to diligent attention and good management oversight. A specialist and dedicated worker undertakes assessments of sibling groups which inform decision making within formal care planning meetings. This includes help with planning how they can be placed together successfully where this is in their best interests.
- The Authority has been successful in recruiting and retaining foster carers and adopters. The assessment and approval process for adopters is thorough and timely. Adopters and carers are supported to a high standard following approval. This means that children are rarely placed with adopters from other agencies. Where children cannot be accommodated by the local authority adopters, alternative placements are promptly identified via the local consortium and the Adoption Register.

- The Authority has implemented the two-stage assessment and approval process for adopters. A number of applicants have completed the first stage and the service is on course to substantially increase the rate at which new adopters are recruited and approved. An effective programme of training to support 'fostering to adopt' is in place, and currently two families are involved. The Authority is also working collaboratively with neighbouring Authorities to develop concurrent placements although this work is at an early stage.
- All adoption panel members are sufficiently well trained and the panel works in a timely and effective manner. The joint adoption and fostering panel meets fortnightly and has an experienced chair who is committed to maintaining good standards of practice. The panel has enough experienced new members to ensure children's plans continue to be considered in a timely and robust way. Cases are considered by the agency decision maker promptly and legal and medical advice is obtained without delay.
- Social workers from the family placement team are involved in care planning for all children who may need a permanent placement. The authority has a family finder who assists in timely planning for children who need adoption and in matching them with adopters or permanent carers who can meet their needs. Whilst the population of Hartlepool is not particularly diverse, managers are aware that they need to make consistent efforts, in conjunction with consortium and regional partners, to ensure as diverse a pool of potential adopters as is possible. The council use external agencies to help identify or recruit carers for individual children with specific cultural needs where this is required and there are no policy or financial barriers to doing so.
- Adoption support services are excellent. Services are available early in the care planning process for children who are being assessed, for adopters, and for birth families. Most of the support, including specialist help, is provided from a team of staff within the service. It includes two play therapists, a specialist social worker and two part time psychologists. Between them, they have significant expertise in child development and children's mental health and provide very high quality support for children and their families. Disruption rates are low, with only one in the last two years, which was reviewed thoroughly to maximise learning.
- Birth parents receive a service which is sensitive, constructive and focused on their contribution to their children's long term stability. Children and their new families secure maximum benefit from these services, which are individualised, driven strongly by the child and families' needs, and make a significant contribution to securing placements.

The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers is good

- The Council's strategy to ensure young people have the same social worker from a permanent decision for a child to be looked after in the through care team whenever possible means that they enjoy successful and enduring

relationships with their social worker that increasingly continues into their early 20s. The case files and discussions with young people and staff evidence a significant range of direct work and support. Workers have a good understanding of care leavers' needs and aspirations alongside what support they need to help them move into adulthood successfully.

- The through care team rightly pride themselves on knowing and understanding the young people they support well, and have good relationships with them which have developed over time. Young people value these relationships and appreciate the continuity and stability having one long term worker provides. Managers agree that they are less successful in measuring the impact of their work, which is an area where they need to make improvements. Action is already being taken to address this issue.
- Young people say they feel safe where they live. The care leavers are well supported in identifying, managing and reducing risks to their own safety. At the time of the inspection, no eligible or relevant care leavers were in custody. The through care team works closely with the youth offending service to take early action to minimise risks of offending behaviour.
- Effective, targeted support with agencies, such as the young people's substance misuse service 'HYPED', and the looked after children's nurse, is helping young people be safe from drugs or alcohol misuse. This contributes to the very low proportion of care leavers needing help to overcome such risky behaviour.
- The health needs of all care leavers are fully assessed. A good performance in timeliness and take up is reported regularly to the Corporate Parenting Forum. All care leavers have access to their health history, but some have declined to take copies. A very small number of the older care leavers who spoke to inspectors reported that they did not all get a full health record.
- Dedicated mental health and therapeutic support is available for care leavers with specialist staff being located at the care leavers' base. This means young people have timely and sensitive support, in a place they feel comfortable in and where they say they feel safe. Regular drop-ins, held in the same place by the dedicated nurse, and onsite location of the team of through care workers, mean there is usually someone on hand in times of need.
- Young people report that they have pathway plans but some were unclear what the plan was for. Pathway plans seen were generally good with some variability in how clear outcomes are in relation to measuring the impact of work with young people. These plans do not do justice to the high quality work taking place as described by both workers and young people themselves.
- Good care and support is provided to the small number of care leavers who are pregnant or have young children. This includes parenting work at the care leavers' base, the looked after nurse drop-ins, and parent and toddler sessions. This means they are able to access immediate advice and guidance and good support. These services help them develop positive relationships

with their own children, and provide a space for the children to play and learn in a safe and welcoming environment.

- The support provided from a recent Care Leaver, who is now employed as a participation officer, is highly valued by young people and also by foster carers who often attend training in the care leaver's base. The personal experience of care and leaving care is described as invaluable. A comprehensive range of support and guidance is provided to help develop care leavers' skills such as budgeting and how to develop safe and positive relationships.
- Young people benefit from significant work by the youth service and the dedicated careers service worker to help them gain employment, education or training opportunities. Effective work with young people and post-16 service provider's smooths transitions and ensures prompt and direct action with providers when there is a risk of breakdown. Such actions, and programmes, like 'Care to Work', are helping to build young people's skills to be ready to work. The Council has a clearly stated intention to increase the number of care leavers taking up apprenticeships. To achieve this, it has recently earmarked four placements specifically for care leavers. Additional personal funding from the Chief Executive is supporting two more ring-fenced apprenticeships.
- The proportion of care leavers not in education, employment or training is in line with the average for care leavers nationally. Despite the local challenges of very high youth unemployment, the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training is in line with the local population and demonstrates positive progress. Managers are aware that there is still more to do to make sure high numbers of care leavers enter training or work.
- There has been improvement in the number of young people taking up university placements. The rate is now in line with that of similar young people nationally. Once there, young people are well supported, visited regularly, supported financially and have a range of successful living arrangements when they return in the holidays. Work is taking place with Teesside University and secondary schools to raise aspirations to increase the rate significantly.
- Young people have a good choice of accommodation and are well prepared for the move into independence. Virtually all are placed in suitable accommodation which is above the rate found nationally. The 'staying put' policy has been in place for a number of years and provides a good stepping stone into independence. Only those who choose to leave at 18 do so, and all are given support to do so successfully.
- Young people are very well supported if they make mistakes. Two examples were identified where young people left foster care at their own volition but did not cope, and were able to return to their former foster carers even though they were over the age of 18. Young people report valuing the above-average leaving care grant, feel safe where they live and none had any complaints about the condition of their accommodation. Robust work takes place with housing partners to secure appropriate accommodation and to

advocate on young people's behalf when they make mistakes and are at risk of losing their homes.

- An example of excellent practice, which developed good accommodation and took account of young people's views, was the recent work to provide new supported housing. Care leavers were fully involved throughout the process from deciding the location, the design, and furnishing of the provision. This added to their sense of safety and ensured that accommodation for young people not quite ready for full independence is available.
- Young people have information about the Council's Pledge for Children in Care and care leavers, but information about legal entitlements has not been systematically shared. The Children in Care Council is currently working with officers to update their Pledge to include information about legal entitlements.

Leadership, management and governance are good

- Senior managers are successful in improving outcomes for vulnerable children demonstrated by their achievements in a range of pivotal areas such as effective early help, sustaining a stable and skilled workforce, good and improved performance in placement stability, educational progress for children looked after and improved timeliness of adoption. Furthermore, their restructure of front line teams and the application of strong and secure thresholds to protect children and young people has resulted in a safe and functional service.
- Managers know their services well and have good improvement plans in place to develop the service further. The programme of implementation is working well.
- Senior managers have a track record of robustly addressing deficits in standards of management and/or practice. Prompt identification and assertive, remedial actions are pursued including the use of formal disciplinary arrangements. The Local Authority is a learning organisation. This is evidenced by its adoption of 'best practice' examples from other local authorities, collaboration with regional partners to develop good practice arrangements, and dissemination of learning from serious case reviews and complaints.
- The Chief Executive, DCS and elected members discharge their statutory duties and clear lines of accountability and governance are in place. Arrangements are in place to ensure that members are routinely kept informed about the performance of children's social care. They receive regular reports, attend the corporate parenting group and there are regular formal and informal meetings with the DCS and senior managers. Reporting is routine and clear. They are sufficiently detailed to enhance elected members' understanding of practice at the frontline.
- Members are passionate and ambitious for the most vulnerable children in Hartlepool; take their role as corporate parents seriously; and ensure funding is protected as far as is possible. Financial management is robust and is a strength for the council. Medium term plans are well developed, and allow the DCS to make secure arrangements for service provision and workforce development.
- The Local Authority and its partners know the characteristics of the population in Hartlepool well. This detailed analysis ensures that services are directed to communities where need is greatest. An example of this is the redesign of children's centres to target areas of highest deprivation. The Joint Strategic Needs Analysis contains a detailed analysis of children and young people in the borough, across the full spectrum of their needs and by where they live. This ensures the most effective alignment of resources and priorities to need.
- Key senior officers and elected members participate in both the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) and the Health and Wellbeing Board with children's issues being given sufficient priority in planning and service delivery.

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board, sets the objectives and targets for children and young people and ensures these are achieved. There is evidence of good joint working between the council and other agencies. This includes the clinical commissioning group, the local hospital trust, Children and Family Court Advisory Service (Cafcass) and the Family Justice Board. Good and effective partnership work is also evidenced by the increasingly good progress of legal proceedings through the courts and swifter progress of positive outcomes for children. Effective partnership work with the police has undergone temporary disruption during a major police organisational restructure in 2013. Key personnel are however now in place allowing council officers to challenge and renegotiate their working relationships.

- Senior managers use skilled and sensitive leadership to acknowledge the need for and to progress the recruitment of a new, more rigorous independent chair of the local safeguarding board. Standards and scrutiny of front line practice in most cases has been effective and managers have mitigated against the potential impact of the Board's weaknesses.
- Partnership with the voluntary sector is strong and underpinned by good commissioning and joint understanding of need in the community. Services which are currently commissioned are subject to regular evaluation and review both in terms of their impact and achievement of expected targets. Services are commissioned in line with strategic priorities in, for example, the early intervention strategy and the children and young people's plan. Individual children with complex needs receive intensive and appropriate support agreed at the multi-agency 'commissioned placements panel'.
- The Council, as a corporate parent, is very committed to, and effective, in securing high quality services for children and young people when they become looked after. Support packages are individualised and tailored to the specific needs of each child, ensuring that they make the best possible progress in achieving good outcomes. For example, a specific investment in expensive dental work for a young person which improved their self-esteem and confidence, enabling them to progress socially and enter further education.
- Looked after children and care leavers are given priority access to many services ensuring their health, education, accommodation and other needs are met promptly and well. New arrangements, such as those pertaining to the Health and Wellbeing Board and public health functions, provide the opportunity to consider improved targeting of services to specific groups of vulnerable children.
- The final draft of the revised performance management framework for children's social care is at the point of sign off. It will effectively synchronise all performance management and quality assurance arrangements in line with reporting schedules. Currently, performance management and management oversight occurs routinely via, for example, measuring performance against a range of key indicators, specifically commissioned audits of areas of potential

concern and monthly performance clinics. Findings and recommendations from these activities appropriately inform the service's single improvement plan.

- Management oversight of practice is well established. One example of driven performance improvement can be seen in the reduction in re-referral rates since February 2013 to 17%, the national average being 25%. Other examples include children being moved to permanent homes more swiftly, and more children who become looked after being tracked through their journey from the time they first need help. Performance information regarding the work of the multi-agency Hub is detailed, and enables senior managers to have a good overview of its functioning of and variations in demand.
- There are an effective range of panels which assist with case decision-making, such as the care planning panel and the complex case panel. These also contribute to good management oversight of practice. Most social workers had detailed knowledge of the children they were working with, and a good analysis of their family dynamics and functioning. This knowledge in most cases appropriately informs assessments and planning although in a very small minority of circumstances this is not the case. The service had identified these shortfalls through their own audits of practice, further emphasising that the local authority knows itself well, including its strengths and deficiencies. This appropriately leads to the quality of professional practice having priority in the service improvement plan.
- There are some good examples where the views of children, young people and their families have impacted on service delivery, including young people attending the Children's Service Committee and good account being taken of their views; the work of the Children in Care Council in terms of designing the Pledge; and parents of children with disabilities being trained to deliver training on short breaks care. Children's social care actively seeks the views of children and their families. This is done through surveys of all those who have received services, including those who have attended a child protection conference.
- Overall the social care workforce is stable, sufficiently experienced, qualified and supported. The recording of supervision varies and does not always include critical analysis and reflection. The appointment of a new and extremely experienced DCS, three weeks prior to the inspection, adds the focus and drive to fulfil the requirements of both strategic and operational agendas. There are very few vacancies and arrangements in place for 'above establishment' staff to be employed, who are able to fill vacancies promptly as they emerge. Newly qualified social workers are well supported with their professional development. Unqualified members of the children's workforce are supported to achieve relevant qualifications. Staff have good access to training and development, including staff who work for the jointly-commissioned out of hour's service. Council-sponsored opportunities are supplemented by a detailed training programme led by the HSCB. Social workers demonstrated passionate commitment to their work, to improving children's lives, and are proud to work in Hartlepool. They receive good

support from skilled, experienced and accessible managers. Formal supervision which includes case direction is regular, and they also enjoy good access to frequent informal case discussion with colleagues and managers.

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

- The Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) must take steps to support the identification, assessment and safeguarding of children at risk of sexual exploitation through implementing the child sexual exploitation screening methodology and developing a plan for implementation to ensure that professional staff are able to use this resource.
- The HSCB must accelerate its work with the Tees-wide Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked group (VEMT) and fully implement the Child Sexual Exploitation strategy to ensure effective, early identification, assessment and intervention for children and young people who may be at risk of/or are being exploited.
- The HSCB should ensure that its work with 'young inspectors' informs the planning and evaluation of service delivery and that this is extended to include feedback from children and families who have directly received help and protective services.
- The HSCB needs to accelerate progress and implementation of its strategic action plan, with a particular focus on children who experience domestic violence and who abuse drugs or alcohol, so that it has a positive impact on outcomes for these vulnerable children and young people.
- The HSCB should develop an effective multi-agency data set and routinely scrutinise partners performance, challenging and auditing where necessary.
- The HSCB should increase its influence and effectiveness through improved strategic arrangements with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Family Justice Council.

Key strengths and weaknesses of the LSCB

- Presently the HSCB does not have an independent chair in post and the role is being covered by the vice chair. Recruitment for a new independent chair is underway.
- The HSCB has not been well led and as a result has a limited picture of how well agencies are working together to support children and families, or the difference they are making to their lives. For example, it does not have an agreed multi-agency data set to monitor performance, and has only minimal information from multi-agency audits and peer review of cases to inform themselves. This means the Board's ability to improve performance by exercising scrutiny and challenge of partners is limited.
- The most recent Section 11 audit was undertaken effectively and did not identify significant issues of concern. However, the Board did not follow up

the findings to maximise learning across the partnership or to inform future practice and improvement.

- The HSCB is not yet able to demonstrate effective leadership or a developed culture of professional challenge. As yet formal arrangements with the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Children's Strategic Partnership and the Family Justice Board are underdeveloped and so do not influence the priorities and resources of these high-level strategic partnerships.
- The HSCB has responsibility for implementing the strategies for tackling domestic violence and neglect which are linked to the needs of children and their families. However, progress has been too slow to measure impact. For example, although a neglect sub group is in place and has made some progress, the Graded Care Profile assessment tool (to measure levels of neglect) is not fully implemented. Training for staff is however planned for 2014. The neglect action plan does not give sufficient priority to the impact on children of parental drug and alcohol abuse. This limits the board's ability to drive improved professional practice for those children.
- A new and potentially effective multi agency joint report for child protection case conferences has been piloted on five cases and has had some early success in engaging partner agencies to manage core groups and to be appropriately accountable for the protection of children and young people.
- The HSCB's VEMT group brings together the focus on children who go missing with those who may be at risk of sexual exploitation. In some aspects such as tracking and monitoring children who go missing, the VEMT shows evidence of early positive impact. Missing procedures are working well. Young people are being tracked, monitored and in most cases receive a return interview. Young people were consulted about who they wanted to carry out return interviews. They often chose to have someone who knows them well, such as their key worker or 'throughcare worker' and this is what happens in practice. However, the Board is not exercising sufficient challenge or scrutiny in relation to why children go missing. Neither is it sponsoring or leading any work to reduce the incidence of missing children. Work relating to children who are at risk of or being sexually exploited is at a very early stage. The screening tool for children at risk of sexual exploitation has not yet been launched. It is therefore not being used by practitioners and so reduces the likelihood of these children being systematically identified. A Tees-wide strategy to address issues of child sexual exploitation is in development, but not fully implemented. No impact can be evidenced as yet.
- The HSCB's development of priorities, action plans and measures of its impact is not sufficiently informed by the views of children. It has engaged with the 'young inspectors' group who have given their views about the HSCB meetings and the priority of tackling neglect. However, there is little evidence that these views, or those of other children and families who have received services, influence service planning or design.
- The HSCB fulfils its statutory responsibilities. It has clear governance arrangements and is regularly attended by a range of appropriate agencies

and lay members. Over the last six months, since the appointment of a new business manager, it has shown acceleration in activity, for example in the process of updating its policies and procedures, updating governance arrangements, and improving the knowledge about private fostering and information-sharing.

- Tees-wide child protection procedures are very good, used by all agencies and readily accessible from the board website. They describe a continuum of need, from children who may benefit from early intervention through to child protection. They also clarify how to make a referral to children's services, and explain the need to seek the consent of parents and older children. Since November 2013, these procedures have been improved by an updated threshold document. This helps agencies to understand which is the most appropriate type of service to meet a child's needs and how to assess that service.
- The HSCB offers sufficient appropriate training informed by relevant research. Although measures of the impact of training need is strengthening, it is underpinned by a good strategy and action plan. Training is complemented by good quality electronic safeguarding bulletins and 'rough guides' to subjects such as core group working, assessment and referral.
- The Serious Case Review Implementation Group works effectively and disseminates learning from serious case reviews held in other authorities as well as lessons learned from local incidents. Lessons learned inform future training and service developments. The group liaises well with the child death overview panel on individual cases and broader public health issues leading to good actions. For example, the production of a 'safer sleeping' public information leaflet following lessons learned about the dangers of co-sleeping from serious incidents and some child deaths.

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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