

# Bolton 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: 14 January – 5 February 2014**

The overall judgement is **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. However, the authority is not yet delivering good protection and help for children, young people and families.

It is Ofsted's expectation that, as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.

<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		<b>Requires improvement</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>Requires improvement</b>

The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) **requires improvement**

The LSCB is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of good.

---

<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.

# Contents

<b>Section 1: the local authority</b>	<b>3</b>
Summary of key findings	3
What does the local authority need to improve?	6
Information about this inspection	8
Information about this local authority area	9
Inspection judgements about the local authority	11
<b>What the inspection judgements mean: the local authority</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Section 2: The effectiveness local safeguarding children board</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>What the inspection judgments mean: the LSCB</b>	<b>32</b>

## Section 1: the local authority

### Summary of key findings

#### **This local authority requires improvement and is not yet good because**

1. Staff from agencies who have a statutory role in investigating child protection concerns, such as police, social workers and health services, do not always meet together at the outset of an investigation to share information and plan their enquiries where there are concerns about the risk of significant harm to children. As a result, enquiries may be compromised and children could be at further risk of harm.
2. When social workers undertake assessments for children who need help or protection, the strengths and risks are not always thoroughly explored. In a small number of cases seen by inspectors, children and young people were reporting that they had been physically assaulted. Child protection enquiries should have been made but had not been.
3. Written plans for children who need help and protection do not always specify what needs to be done, when by, or who should do it. For example, some plans do not state how often the social worker and other workers should visit the child. Some plans do not explain what will happen if the parents do not comply with the plan.
4. The quality of social workers' records is variable, and some are poor. Chronologies are present but these are not consistently up to date or comprehensive. Managers and senior managers regularly check case files and give advice if improvements or more work are needed, but the poor recording and practice found in some 20 cases had not been addressed prior to it being raised during the inspection.
5. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) who chair child protection conferences and review plans for children have high case loads. In some cases they do not make sure that child protection planning is good enough.
6. IROs are also required to monitor and review plans for looked after children. They hold the reviews on time, but in many cases they do not have time to monitor the progress of plans between reviews and they do not always see children and young people as part of their reviews. In some cases there are delays in distributing minutes. Due to capacity issues, the IRO service does not carry out its quality assurance function of collecting information and reporting on how services are making life better for children.
7. Few children attend their child protection case conferences, and advocacy services are not available to all who do attend. This results in children's and young people's views not being fully taken into account in meetings to promote their welfare.

8. Looked after children and young people do not always get help with their mental health problems as soon as they need it.
9. Looked after children and care leavers who met inspectors were not fully aware of their entitlements.
10. Some of the areas for improvement identified during this inspection, such as the effectiveness of the independent reviewing service, the variable quality of the social work assessments and the support to children and young people with mental health issues, were also reported in the last Ofsted inspection in March 2012, and the local authority has not yet done enough to improve them.

**The local authority has the following strengths:**

11. Agencies in Bolton work well together to provide early help to children and their families.
12. Senior managers have provided consistent and visible leadership for children's services. All social workers met during the inspection reported that they were proud to be working in Bolton, and could describe effective work to improve children's lives. The workforce strategy is good and ensures that there are well trained staff who work permanently for the borough and have good knowledge of the children and families they are supporting.
13. Agencies work well together to tackle child sexual exploitation in the borough, including supporting young people at risk and tackling offenders at an early stage.
14. Decisions on whether a child should become looked after are carefully considered and involve senior officers. The vast majority of children and young people live in settled placements that meet their needs. The small number who are placed out of the area receive good support. The family placement team provides good support to foster carers.
15. Social workers know the looked after children they work with well and visit them regularly. Children are positive about the support offered by their social worker or key workers and are proud about their achievements.
16. Strong partnership working between the virtual school for looked after children and carer leavers and schools across Bolton is driving improvements in pupils' attendance, achievements and their progress in class. The inclusion services help to reduce the number of young people temporarily excluded from school and help looked after children to access their full entitlement to education. Support to families who home educate is good.
17. Adoption performance is good. When adoption is the right course of action, the authority makes sure this proceeds swiftly. People who want to adopt a child receive good advice and preparation along with a timely, careful assessment of

their suitability. Children and adopters are matched quickly and fully supported throughout the process.

18. The After-Adoption support service offers a wide range of services that are open to all adopters, and high quality assessments and support to families who need it.
19. Care leavers describe the support, advice and guidance provided as good. Bolton offers a good range of accommodation options, including staying with the same foster carers after reaching 18 years of age. Many young people are in education, training or employment, and a good number of care leavers go on to university.
20. The children in care council is active and influential, meeting with senior officers and elected members to contribute to service developments. Councillors, particularly those responsible for children's services, have a good understanding of social work services from weekly briefings with senior officers and through meeting children and young people.

## **What does the local authority need to improve?**

### **Areas for improvement**

21. Ensure that the police, and other agencies where relevant, are involved in strategy discussions and meetings, and local authority designated officer (LADO) meetings.
22. Ensure that in strategy discussions and meetings, including those managed by the LADO, agreed actions, responsibilities and timescales are clearly recorded and reviewed to ensure their completion.
23. Ensure that the quality of assessments is consistently good and takes full account of risk and protective factors, and of the impact of the situation on each child in a family's life experience.
24. Ensure that plans for children in need and in need of protection prioritise areas of risk. They should be specific, measurable, include who is responsible for actions, and have clear timescales for improved outcomes for children. Contingency planning and visiting frequency should also be detailed.
25. Ensure that case recording is of a consistently good quality, including a clear rationale for the contact, whether the child was seen and alone, and the child's views if appropriate.
26. Ensure that quality assurance arrangements are rigorous and robustly challenge practice and recording if not consistently good.
27. Increase the participation of children at child protection case conferences and ensure that advocacy services are available for all of them.
28. Improve the IRO service so that all aspects of the role as set out in the care planning regulations are met; this to include ensuring that looked after children are seen as part of their reviews, that care plans are monitored between reviews, and that child protection and children looked after meetings rigorously ensure that actions across agencies are successfully completed. When practice is seen as not good enough, ensure that this is documented and formally reported to senior managers and the BSCB for their action.
29. Ensure that all children in care and care leavers know and understand their entitlements.
30. Review the looked after children pathway for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and ensure that all children, young people and carers have timely access to support to address their emotional well-being, including improving the use of strength and difficulties questionnaires.

31. Ensure that social workers for looked after children improve the quality of information given at the point of placement, and their responsiveness to foster carers.
32. Develop the corporate apprenticeship strategy so that it specifically identifies aspirational targets for care leavers and the actions that the local authority, virtual college and partners will take to maximise opportunities for care leavers to enter the world of work successfully through this training route.

## **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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

### **The inspection team**

Lead inspector: Robert Hackeson

Team inspectors: Neil Penswick, Fiona Parker, Linda Steele, Sarah Urding, Shirley Bailey, Margaret Farrow.



## Information about this local authority area<sup>2</sup>

### Children living in this area

- Approximately 65,250 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Bolton. This is 23% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 23% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 19% (the national average is 18%)
  - in secondary schools is 19% (the national average is 15%)
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 29% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British who account for 20% of the population.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 26% (the national average is 18%).
  - in secondary schools is 20% (the national average is 14%).

### Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2013, 4,179 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 4,187 at 31 March 2012.
- At 31 March 2013, 215 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 236 at 31 March 2012. However, during the inspection this figure reached over 340, representing a 63% increase in the last ten months.
- At 31 March 2013, 13 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from 14 at 31 March 2012.

### Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2013, 540 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 83 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 515 (80 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2012.

---

<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.

- Of this number, 100 (19%) live outside the local authority area
  - 30 live in residential children’s homes
  - Five live in residential special schools<sup>3</sup>
  - 395 live with foster families
  - 60 live with parents
  - 45 were placed for adoption
  - There are no unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- During 2012–13:
- there were 150 who have ceased to be looked after, which included:
  - 45 adoptions
  - 10 children who became subject of special guardianship orders
  - 10 children who became the subject of residence orders
  - 45 children who returned to live with parents or relatives
  - 20 children and young people who have ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living.

### **Other Ofsted inspections**

- The local authority operates six children’s homes. Five were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of Bolton’s safeguarding arrangements was in March 2012. The local authority was judged to be Good.

The previous inspection of Bolton’s services for looked after children was in March 2012. The local authority was judged to be Good.

The previous inspection of Bolton’s adoption service was in June 2009. The local authority was judged to be Good.

The previous inspection of Bolton’s fostering services was in November 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 January 2007. She has also been responsible for adult services since December 2012
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since January 2010.

---

<sup>3</sup> 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 require improvement**

33. Agencies in Bolton work together well to provide early help to children and their families. The Framework for Action underpins this and provides partners with a pathway to prioritise and determine what services are required to support, respond to and coordinate a range of early help services to children and young people. Agencies use the common assessment framework well to assess the needs of children and young people. Together with families, they agree which services should be offered through child action meetings before difficulties become serious enough to need intervention from children's social care.
34. There are 18 children's centres and these have recently been reorganised to focus on targeted intervention. Only two of the ten children's centres inspected to date by Ofsted are rated good, compared with 68% nationally, resulting in a lack of consistency in the quality of the support being offered to families across the borough.
35. Police domestic abuse notifications are emailed daily to social care referral and assessment duty where consideration occurs for social work support. Urgent cases of high risk are telephoned through for immediate action. Health and education also receive copies of the police notifications, and this is good practice. Parents who met inspectors reported very positively about the support to them and how this has built their confidence in tackling issues around domestic violence, helping them to parent better and reduce risks to their children.
36. The Family First strategy coordinates the interventions of workers across all of the services for children. It is contributing to a significant reduction in the proportion of young people who exhibit offending behaviour; since January 2013 there has been a reduction from 160 incidents to 12 in targeted families.
37. Partner agencies understand and apply the thresholds for referral to children's social care services. They receive a good response from the referral and assessment teams when they make contact to discuss concerns to help them decide whether a formal referral is warranted. Where concerns are escalating, support from children's social care services is easily accessed. Inspectors saw examples of such cases being 'stepped up' appropriately through the weekly Multi-Agency Resource Panel (MARP) and other cases 'stepped down' where outcomes for children had improved following social work intervention.
38. Most contacts and referrals are dealt with promptly and thoroughly by the three locality referral and assessment teams and the Children with Disabilities team. However, there is a lack of consistency of response from the social care service. In a small minority of cases seen by inspectors risks were not fully assessed,

cases were closed prematurely or children were assessed as in need when child protection procedures should have been applied.

39. A lack of capacity within the local police public protection investigation unit (PPIU) restricts their ability to participate in strategy discussions. In a small number of cases seen by inspectors this resulted in social workers visiting children suspected of suffering significant harm without a discussion with the police; this lack of joint planning in advance of enquiries meant that information was not shared and agencies were potentially working in isolation.
40. In a small minority of the cases, child protection enquiries should have been initiated but had not been. In addition, two of the cases had been closed without a thorough consideration of the risks, leaving children at risk of significant harm.
41. When child protection concerns are the subject of a strategy meeting, in the main these only involve the police and children's social care. Other agencies, such as health services, are not routinely involved, and their information is not always available to inform decision making. When child protection enquiries are initiated these are timely and undertaken by suitably qualified social workers.
42. The quality of social work assessments is variable. This was also identified as an issue at the last Ofsted inspection in March 2012, and there has been insufficient progress to ensure that they are consistently good. Overall, written assessments are too descriptive of the children and families' circumstances and lack an exploration of life from the child's point of view. In a small minority of cases there has been a lack of professional challenge and an over-reliance on what parents were saying, in particular in relation to parents' substance misuse and domestic violence. Children and young people who need an assessment by social workers are seen and, where appropriate, seen alone. Most social workers have a good knowledge of their children and families; however, this is not translated into an explicit consideration of the risk and capacity of the parents to protect the child.
43. Team managers and deputy team managers know the cases in the teams well and maintain day-to-day oversight on cases and duty work; however, management oversight does not always sufficiently challenge practice, for example where assessments are not robust and are lacking in detail. Challenge to workers and support is conducted through regular supervision, where actions are checked to ensure that they are working and timely. Supervision records are case and task orientated, however actions are not sufficiently prioritised or timescales identified and the recording does not evidence that there is deep consideration of the risks in the case and the professional judgement that is made in this regard. Although there is an audit programme, and senior management overview of cases, these had not identified and robustly addressed key deficiencies seen by inspectors during this inspection, such as the quality of assessments and variable quality of recording.

44. All child protection plans seen by inspectors were up to date but most were not sufficiently detailed in setting specific and achievable objectives; as a consequence, progress was not easy to measure. Some plans are unnecessarily long, making it difficult for parents and professionals to concentrate on the key changes needed to reduce risks. Visiting frequency and contingency planning are not routinely included in written plans, resulting in some cases in parents not being fully aware of the consequences if risks were not sufficiently reduced.
45. A good range of direct work is undertaken by social workers and family support workers in all the teams, providing effective support for children in need of help and protection. A good example is the one-to-one work with parents and children to increase awareness around keeping safe where domestic abuse is a concern. Parents and young people who spoke to inspectors were positive about the quality of their relationships with social workers, who they report to be available, open, honest and respectful. One young person stated that her social worker was 'brilliant, always available ensuring that I understood what was happening.'
46. The independent reviewing officers who chair child protection conferences have high caseloads and, as a result, are not able to monitor and improve the quality of work. One conference attended by an inspector was insufficiently challenging to other agencies on the lack of progress on the case. Review conferences are not always quorate and some schools do not routinely attend when children on roll are involved. The minutes of child protection conferences are not consistently distributed in a timely manner. Currently only 60% are distributed within 20 working days. Core groups and child protection conferences are timely, and reports prepared for child protection conference by social workers and other professionals are usually shared with families beforehand, assisting the families' understanding of concerns.
47. Children and young people are supported to participate in the child protection planning process through the use of child-friendly information packs and are able to record their views prior to child protection conferences. Levels of attendance by children and young people at conferences and core groups are low. The local authority has been piloting an advocacy service for a very small number of children subject to child protection plans.
48. The local authority and the BSCB had committed to reducing the number of children subject to child protection plans, and this had gone down from 236 in March 2012 to 213 in March 2013. However, in the last ten months there has been a significant increase and at the time of the inspection there were over 340 children subject to child protection plans. There has not been a study with partner agencies on the reasons for the 63% increase in formal plans, the impact on the services and whether alternative strategies could also provide for the needs of these families. Alongside the increase in numbers subject to a plan, there has been a worsening in the timeliness of initial child protection conferences from 89% at the beginning of 2013–4 to 79% currently, although this remains above the national average.

49. Chronologies are present in case records, although they are not consistently up to date or comprehensive. Case recording is variable. Some good examples were seen by inspectors, including detailed observations of children's presentation and development and clear evidence of the progress of the case. In other cases, though, the recording was minimal. Management decision making is evident in case records, but the rationale for the decisions made is not always sufficiently detailed.
50. The LADO considers allegations against adults who work with children. Police and social workers do not attend all of the meetings, reportedly due to capacity issues within those agencies. Information is gathered from them prior to meetings; however, in a minority of cases seen by inspectors, not all of the necessary checks had taken place prior to decisions being taken at the meeting. When decisions are made by the LADO not to take further action, the recording of the rationale is not always clear.
51. Bolton's out-of-hours social work services are provided by generic social workers and this offers good consideration of all the issues within the family. Outreach support is also available from the adolescent unit if needed to prevent children coming into care. The availability of electronic records and a senior manager being on call enables informed decision making and good communication with the day-time services.
52. The leaving care service supports young people aged 16-17 at risk of becoming homeless well. They immediately assess their situation and use the commissioned mediation service to try to resolve difficulties at home, or they provide accommodation similar to that offered to care leavers.
53. Arrangements to address child sexual exploitation are good. The EXIT team, co-located with the police, undertakes direct work, assessments and monitoring of children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation. Effective targeted and preventative action is a priority. The use of a CSE indicator tool is established and used by most agencies, however this is yet to be embedded in schools. Preventative strategies and disruption activity are proving effective and giving strong messages of 'no tolerance' to perpetrators. Where levels of risk are intensifying, as identified through intelligence or disclosure, prompt CSE strategies are held to coordinate investigations, assessments and plans. In cases seen by inspectors, risks had substantially reduced following interventions by the team.
54. Arrangements for identifying and tracking children and young people missing from home or care are in place, but patterns and trends are yet to be analysed. The Missing From Home police officer is co-located in the Exit team and reviews on a daily basis all missing from home incidents. All risks, including of CSE, are communicated to a children's services senior manager on a daily basis. Police and social care meet weekly to discuss all cases open to the police and social care, and fortnightly focus on those young people at high risk of CSE and of going missing.

55. The support for children missing from education is well developed. The local authority has developed a good joined-up approach to support pupils at risk of missing out on school, such as children home educated, newly arrived and in alternative provision such as the PRU. For instance, in the past two years the work to track and check the safety and achievements of home educated children has been completely overhauled, with effective systems and arrangements now in place. Families who choose to home educate are supported by visits which ensure that children are safe and appropriately educated. In addition, a school nurse ensures that all home educated children's immunisations are up to date.
56. Timely referrals to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) are made as necessary and interventions in high risk domestic abuse cases benefit from good access to independent domestic abuse advisors.
57. Privately fostered children and young people and their carers receive a responsive service which supports placements well. Regular visits by social workers promote stability and positive outcomes for children, in particular those attending language and sport schools. Good attention is given to their family circumstances, their religion and culture.
58. Case records demonstrate that the individual and diverse needs of children, including needs arising out of disability, ethnicity, language and gender, are considered in assessments and addressed well. This is supported by the work of a Black and Minority Ethnic family support worker who promotes positive and relevant social work practice to meet the cultural and language needs of children and their families. Access to interpreters is readily available for children, young people and their families for whom English is not their first language.

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

59. A range of highly effective services are in place to support families and children and young people on the edge of care. This includes the Adolescent Support Unit rated outstanding by Ofsted, which offers outreach, one-to-one support and short breaks for young people; and the family group conferencing service, run by Barnardos and contracted to work with 40 families each year. Due to these initiatives the number of young people over the age of 11 coming into care each year has reduced by approximately half over the past five years.
60. Decision making on whether a child should become looked after is managed at an appropriately senior level. Care planning involves an incremental process: exploring reunification at home as a first option; followed by placement with extended family; and then consideration of foster care or residential care. Adoption is always considered, and for young children decisions are sufficiently timely.

61. The vast majority of children live in placements that meet their needs. Some 23% of children looked after in Bolton are living with family and friends carers. Thorough assessments explore the viability of such arrangements and whether or not they match the needs of the children. Carers who met inspectors reported that they were very positive about the range and effectiveness of support available, including the network of support groups run by carers such as an Asian carers' group, a men's group and a 'fostering buddy' scheme.
62. Good quality court assessments fully define risks and make suitable recommendations to promote the welfare of the children. Bolton is working with the local family justice board to reduce court delays for children. Timescales for care proceedings, reported as 35 weeks, are still higher in Bolton and in the North West overall than the 26 week timescale now required. The Public Law Outline procedure devised by Bolton last year, and adopted by Greater Manchester local authorities, is due to be further evaluated in April 2014.
63. Reunification with family is considered regularly at the staying safe resource management panel, which includes senior officers. When the plan for a child is to return home, effective multi-agency work and clear planning help parents understand what they need to do to ensure that children are safe and their needs can be met.
64. The long-term social work teams know the children they work with very well and visit them regularly, meeting statutory requirements. Children are seen alone and are regularly consulted about their wishes and feelings. Social workers and other professionals undertake good direct work with children, such as life story work, to help them understand their identity. Children who met inspectors were positive about the support offered by their social workers or key workers and are proud of their achievements.
65. Children looked after who met with inspectors say that they feel safe from bullying and report positively about the support they receive from school and placements. Voice4You, the children's consultation group, has also identified that tackling bullying is a priority for their work.
66. Good arrangements are in place to minimise risks of offending behaviour. The Youth Offending Team works with looked after young people who are offending or at risk of offending and provides a range of schemes to help keep them safe and engage in activities that will support their education or employment opportunities. The latest available data, for 2012–13, shows the proportion of looked after children cautioned or convicted was lower than similar authorities and England averages: 4% compared with 6% nationally.
67. Children's health needs are kept under review through regular health and dental checks, and immunisations are up to date. Specialist training is provided by the LAC health team to carers, staff, GPs, school nurses and adopters. There is a dedicated pathway for looked after children in the Bolton child and adolescent mental health team (CAMHS). However, due to capacity issues and



a significant rise in referrals, CAMHS have introduced new criteria to accept only urgent or critical cases and respond within the national 18-week timescale for referrals. This has resulted in delays in receiving a timely service for some of the most vulnerable children looked after. The percentage of strength and difficulties questionnaires completed is much lower than comparators (53%:71%). This was a recommendation at the last Ofsted inspection and nobody has been identified with primary responsibility for their collation.

68. Strong partnerships between schools and the virtual schools has led to improvements in pupils' progress and achievements at both Key Stage 2 and 4 in 2012. While performance dipped in 2013 at Key Stage 4, the proportion achieving five good GCSEs remains above that nationally. Current tracking data show that 29% of care leavers already have a grade A-C in English or mathematics and this group is already making better progress from their starting points than last year, and at a faster rate than that found nationally.
69. The current progress of looked after children in primary schools is good from their individual starting points. Detailed current tracking data for primary aged pupils from Key Stage 1 also show that all looked after children in Year 3 are making at least expected progress in reading and maths and 94% in writing, which is good.
70. Current tracking is detailed enough to enable analysis of pupils' progress over time. Information is used to identify those at risk of falling behind and challenge and support are provided by the virtual head teachers to help children to catch up. A team of key workers provides additional support when needed, including booster classes and one-to-one support to help students meet their targets. The virtual school team monitors PEPs and contacts schools where there are concerns around the information provided.
71. Very few children looked after are excluded from school on a temporary basis and there have been no permanent exclusions since 2011. Urgent action is taken when children are missing from school and the improving attendance rates pay testament to the impact of such work; current rates are 96.8%, above that found nationally for similar groups and this is very good. All looked after children access their 25 hours entitlement to education. A very small number have an alternative curriculum and this is designed to meet their individual needs, where their achievements and attendance are checked regularly.
72. A similar proportion of looked after children attend good or better schools to that found for all children nationally. Care is taken to ensure school placement stability; this includes support to schools and carers. As a result numbers moving school in-year are low.
73. Children educated out of the area are entitled to the same support as young people in the area. As a means of improving further, a virtual school for looked

after children out of borough has been developed. Very few children are placed in residential special schools away from their home communities.

74. Most children who come into care do so in emergency situations. In particular for older children and siblings groups the placement matches available are limited. Foster carers and children, though, are well supported in forming positive relationships that allow the children to thrive with their initial carer. Consequently when the child's plan is finalised as permanency, in many cases the existing carers offer to continue, giving them continuity and stability. This is carefully assessed to ensure that where the child is living has met the child's needs to date and that the carers have the capacity to continue to do so throughout their childhood.
75. Bolton has a good performance on placement stability. Most children and young people remain living with the same foster carers or in the right children's home. It has been ambitious in identifying where further improvements could be made in placement stability and in the sufficiency of provision for teenagers: a recruitment campaign is underway to increase the number of carers, and Keep Safe training is being delivered to enable existing carers to manage teenagers' risk taking behaviour.
76. Assessments of children's attachments and contact needs are generally of very good quality. Children and young people who spoke to inspectors said that they have regular contact with their family and can see their friends where they live. Suitable contact is also arranged with significant other people in their lives, who are not relatives but are important to them, such as former foster carers.
77. The majority of children and young people live in foster placements provided by the local authority, close to their original home. Most of those living with carers from independent fostering agencies or in a children's home are in settings that are judged good by Ofsted. The small number of children who are placed out of the area receive good support. They live a short distance from the Bolton area, mostly within 20 miles, and all are visited regularly by their social workers. Good reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring authorities ensure their health and education needs are met in a timely way. A young person spoken to in an out of area placement as part of this inspection reported positively on the support they received from the local authority.
78. Currently only six children are waiting for a long term foster placement and active family finding is taking place for these both in-house and among independent fostering agencies.
79. Adoption performance and support is good overall, including the number of children and the timeliness of achieving permanency. Some aspects are outstanding.
80. Bolton has a good understanding of the changing needs of its looked after children and a clear strategy to deliver the majority of services in-house unless

an assessed need determines alternative provision is required. This involves the prioritisation of the recruitment of family and friend's foster carers and promotion of special guardianship as an alternative to care, to ensure that mainstream foster care and residential provision is used only for those children who most need it.

81. Leaving care support is good for older looked after children and this ensures the achievement of positive outcomes on health, education and training.
82. Care plans vary in quality and whilst most are good, some are not specific, do not set timescales and do not reflect the voice of the child sufficiently. Children and young people who met inspectors said they do contribute to and understand their care plans.
83. Inspectors observed good practice with children's participation in reviews of their care, including the engagement of some very young children and children with disabilities. Thoughtful work had been undertaken to ensure children could express themselves, or were fully represented in the review.
84. The Independent Reviewing service is under pressure. In addition to child protection conferences, IROs also chair children looked after reviews. IROs are suitably independent but caseloads are high at around 140, which restricts their ability to carry out all aspects of the role set out in the care planning regulations. Children looked after reviews are mainly held on time, but IROs do not routinely meet with children prior to or between their reviews to monitor the progress of care planning. Some children looked after had not been seen by their IROs. Although individual examples of challenge were seen, the quality assurance aspect of the IRO service is limited. The IRO service does not currently evaluate its own performance sufficiently to be able to identify what difference it is making.
85. The family placement team provides good support to foster carers and a wide range of additional support is available, for example through the support groups run by carers themselves. Delegated powers are agreed at the start of a placement and they are clear, age appropriate and help to normalise experience for children and carers.
86. Although there were positive examples of good liaison and communication with individual children's social workers, foster carers who met with inspectors identified the quality of information provided by children's social workers at the point of placement, and their availability and efficiency as poor. Examples given of the negative impact on children included one child starting a new school four days late because her social worker had failed to place her on the new school's roll despite advance warning of several months.
87. Young people know how to make a complaint and who to talk to if something is troubling them. The advocacy service regularly visits Bolton's children's homes to hear young people's views about the care provided.

88. The Corporate Parenting Panel is made up of councillors and staff from every local authority department and they meet regularly to make sure that the Corporate Parenting Strategy is promoting improved outcomes for looked after children. Senior councillors, including the 'Children's Champion', robustly support the importance of these children in Bolton. Achievements are celebrated at regular events, and senior officers and elected members have a good knowledge of and pride in individual children and young people.
89. Voice4U, Bolton's children in care council is well established and active and the participation of looked after children has strong corporate support. Looked after children are involved in a range of activities to help improve the local authority's services. For example, they have been involved in devising health questionnaires to inform service delivery following health assessments and a children's guide, 'Are You Looked After?' Voice4U is currently working on a refreshed Pledge that will include information on looked after children's entitlements, but this document is not yet in place and consequently looked after children do not have up-to-date information on their entitlements.

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

90. The strong commitment to adoption from members and senior officers is demonstrated in the increased resources provided to the adoption service and increased staffing levels during a time of financial austerity.
91. The most recent adoption scorecard, published in January 2014, indicates 25% of all children who leave care are adopted. Bolton has sustained excellent performance on this indicator.
92. The proportion of children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is also better than the average nationally, and local data for April to December 2013 show a further improvement, rising from 63% to 76%. Timescales for care proceedings require further reduction to meet the 26 week requirement stipulated by the Family Justice Review, and in a small minority of cases lengthy proceedings have resulted in extensive delay for children. Recruitment, training and assessment of prospective adopters is well coordinated, inclusive, efficient and timely. Good reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring authorities minimise delay by increasing frequency and availability of preparation groups for carers.
93. The decision making process is thorough. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is at a suitable level of seniority in the organisation and has access to high quality advice when making decisions about whether children should be placed for adoption.
94. The adoption panel carries out all its functions effectively. It is led by an experienced independent chair, and panel members receive regular relevant training. Decisions are reached through thoughtful analysis and careful

consideration of children's attachment needs supplemented by meeting with social workers and prospective adopters.

95. There is some variability in the quality of Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) and Prospective Adopters' Reports (PARs) but they are generally good. Constructive feedback from the panel to workers has improved consistency, and robust quality assurance systems ensure any variability does not result in delay for children.
96. Adoptive applicants who come to the panel are from a range of diverse backgrounds, ensuring a wide pool of adopters is available for Bolton's children.
97. Adopters spoke highly of the support they had received throughout the process and the speed with which they were matched following approval. One adopter told inspectors 'they make you feel at ease and help you realise there is no such thing as a perfect parent. They want normal people who are going to love their children'.
98. Currently the authority is actively family finding for 50 Bolton children, demonstrating a high commitment to securing adoptive families for all children who need them. Effective arrangements through the regional consortium 'Adoption 22' and the local authority's commissioning arrangements maximise placement availability and choice for the children in need of adoption who require a family outside the Bolton area.
99. Robust systems are in place to achieve adoption for children when it is difficult to find families for them because they need to live with their brothers and sisters, have complex needs, or are older. In the most recently published adoption scorecard, 7% of children had their plans changed from adoption to other forms of permanence compared to an England average of 9%, demonstrating better than average success in finding placements for children. Although numbers of children adopted who were aged five and over were small they also compared favourably to national comparators.
100. The authority maintains a high profile at Adoption Exchange days and Activity days, showing some success. At a recent Activity day held in Bolton a child with complex needs found her family. There has been collaboration with Mosque leaders to assist in attracting interest from the local Muslim community.
101. Planning for children to move from foster carer to adopters is thoughtful and child centred. Adopters are assisted in putting together information on their family that is age appropriate and foster carers work well with adopters in a flexible and supportive way, enabling children to cope with the transition more easily.
102. The quality of life story books and later life letters provided to carers is generally good. They follow a clear format based on research evidence that assists children to understand their history.

103. Post-adoption support to adoptive families is well developed. Informal supports are provided to adopters through a good range of activities including, bi-annual social events that are well attended, parent and toddler groups and access to a library of resources.
104. When families need more individualised help, assessments of adoption support needs are of a high quality. They result in families receiving timely help, including financial support where necessary. Examples were seen of families and schools receiving advice and training on assisting children to form positive attachments that helped make their placements more secure.
105. Adoption disruptions are very low and disruption meetings are held at whatever point disruption occurs, including during introductions. These meetings demonstrate detailed and thoughtful analysis of what went wrong that informs future planning for individual children and families and is used for organisational learning.
106. Birth parents have access to counselling services through an independent counselling service although take up is low; the adoption support service has responded to a growing number of requests from birth parents to help them to write letters as part of a letterbox agreement arrangement.

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

107. Good efforts are made to help care leavers to be safe and feel safe. Care leavers spoke convincingly about how safe they feel in their chosen accommodation and community. They say they are well supported to understand risks to their safety from, for example, sexual exploitation, drugs and alcohol. Care leavers report that they have ready access in times of need to support from their workers or from specialist agencies such as the sexual health service 'Parallel' and Bolton Integrated Drugs and Alcohol Service (BDAS). The proportion needing hospital treatment is low because issues are tackled before they become a real problem.
108. Good links into MARAC help to support care leavers at risk of domestic violence effectively. For example, a dedicated MARAC worker is currently supporting three young people to help them keep safe from domestic violence.
109. There are good systems in place for ensuring that care leavers have regular, timely health assessments that result in comprehensive, individualised health action plans prepared by the lead professional. Care Leavers have a choice of venues and of lead professionals to facilitate engagement, and take up is good.
110. Improvements in the way that information about care leavers' health and immunisation history are reported to young people means that all Year 11 students receive this information before they transfer to the leaving care team. Young people also report that they are provided with their national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports in a timely way.

111. Most pathway plans provide a detailed assessment of young people's needs, aspirations, and outcomes of discussions and evidence of their involvement. This is an improvement from the last inspection of the service. Care leavers say they understand the purpose of the plan and feel their views are always considered.
112. Audits of pathway plans carried out by service managers accurately identified areas of strength and things that needed to be better, and have resulted in improvements where needed. Training and support is provided to workers when necessary through, for example, coaching of individual staff or whole team training.
113. Transition arrangements for children with a disability into the young adults' service are effective. One head teacher from a local special school spoke eloquently about the good arrangements for his looked after pupils as they move from the children with disability team into the young adults' service.
114. Direct support, care and guidance to young people to help them develop and maintain strong relationships with staff and carers is good, as is the support during their transitions into independence. Care leavers spoken to provided strong and powerful testament to the good support, advice and guidance provided by their workers and carers to prepare them fully for independence. The comment of one echoed that of all when she said, 'my worker is always there for me'.
115. Significant efforts are made by leaving care staff, partners like Connexions and, increasingly, the virtual college to help young people gain employment, education or training opportunities. These, along with programmes such as Quest, which builds young people's skills and confidence to prepare them for the world of work, and the Looked After Supported Employment scheme which provides work experience, are actively increasing the proportion of young people entering education, employment or training. The most recent published data available indicate that the proportion is above that found nationally and an improvement on the previous year.
116. The collective focus on raising aspirations of care leavers is making a positive difference to the number choosing to go university. The proportion has increased well over recent years and is above that found nationally for similar young people. The local authority provides above and beyond the minimum funding entitlement at £3,000 annually, and provides a range of additional financial support such as funds for books or field studies and the cost of a number of return journeys home. Leaving care workers visit regularly and keep in touch through telephone calls, texts and emails. Students are able to return to their carers or accommodation in holiday times.
117. Currently only two care leavers are accessing apprenticeships in the local authority. The corporate strategy for apprenticeships has identified care leavers as a priority group with the intention to 'ring-fence' some apprenticeships just

for them. This does not identify a specific number, making it difficult for the Corporate Parenting Board to measure the strategy's success in terms of the number taking them up or moving onto full time employment.

118. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that care leavers have a choice of accommodation. Young people spoken to all said they were able to influence where they lived and decisions were taken in accordance of their wishes. A Bolton continuing care policy preceded the government's 'staying put' policy by a number of years. This has ensured that young people who want to remain with their foster carers after age 18 can do so. Currently there are 12 young adults using this as their preferred option.
119. Partnerships with the commissioned housing services are strong. Regular attendance at care leavers' pathway plan reviews helps to ensure young people can live in the accommodation of their choice or move from either foster carer or supported housing to full independence when ready. Training for foster carers is provided to help them develop their young people's independence skills but also to support them to manage the behaviour of older teenagers.
120. When care leavers occasionally experience difficulties with their accommodation, every effort is made to ensure they do not become homeless. Several examples were provided to show how workers and agencies go out of their way to enable them to maintain safe living arrangements.
121. Care leavers spoken to by inspectors were not aware of a Pledge by the corporate parenting board outlining their commitment to meeting responsibilities for looked after children. This is currently being revised to ensure that the rights and entitlements for the care leavers are up to date.
122. The most recent published data indicate a lower than average proportion of looked after young people convicted, cautioned or subject to a final warning from the police, which is good. Although seven care leavers are currently in custody, good partnership working between the Youth Offending Service and leaving care staff ensures that they are visited regularly, supported during their stay and timely plans are put in place for their eventual return to the community.



## **Leadership, management and governance requires improvement**

123. Front line children's services are too variable and not consistently good for all children and young people. In a minority of cases the local authority had not initiated child protection enquiries when children reported being assaulted by family members. The local authority urgently re-opened these cases, which they acknowledged had not been conducted appropriately under their own procedures. Poor practice and recording in approximately 20 cases had not been identified by managers prior to being raised by inspectors.
124. During the inspection, social care staff spoke to inspectors about a lack of capacity by the Greater Manchester Police to respond in a timely manner to child protection issues. Work was being carried out promptly by the authority to visit children in these cases but there was a lack of joint planning and information gathering with partner agencies to ensure that all safeguarding issues were being robustly considered. This has not been rigorously challenged by the local authority or the Bolton Safeguarding Children Board.
125. The authority's quality assurance arrangements have not robustly addressed the variability in the social work practice across the borough, in particular the quality of assessments, plans and the recording where children are being considered for further assistance and where there are child protection concerns.
126. The IRO service is under pressure. It has a wide range of responsibilities and lacks the capacity to see every looked after child as part of their review or between reviews or to carry out fully its quality assurance function, and it is not compliant with statutory requirements. Despite some good work by individual IROs, poor practice by agencies is not always challenged during reviews of child protection conferences and reviews of looked after children.
127. While many have been successfully dealt with, several of the weaknesses identified in this inspection also featured in the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children services in March 2012. For example, that inspection report highlighted as areas of weaker practice the quality and consistency of assessments, the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service and the low take-up of strengths and difficulties questionnaires to support children and young people with mental health issues.
128. Senior managers provide visible and consistent leadership for children's services. They have a good knowledge of some individual children and young people, including high profile cases, those in care proceedings and those placed outside Bolton. The Assistant Director samples case records on a daily basis and has a rotating monthly forum in which he and members of his management team visits different teams to review and audit individual cases with social workers and team managers. Performance as measured by the national data indicators is mostly good. The local authority monitors the statistics to enable an understanding of its achievement. However, these combined efforts have

not resulted in an awareness of all the deficits within the services across the borough or into robust action to improve them. Senior managers do not have the systems in place to ensure that they understand and respond to messages from the front line effectively.

129. Local authority councillors, in particular the deputy lead and the lead children's member (the 'children's champion'), have a good understanding of social work services, especially for looked after children, from weekly briefings and engagement with children and young people themselves. They provide a rigorous challenge to the corporate parenting board, which has led to the improvements in outcomes for looked after children evidenced during this inspection.
130. The Chief Executive similarly provides a performance challenge to the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director with a clear expectation that good services should be delivered to the people of Bolton. He has also recently taken over the supervision of the chair of BSCB, and this has resulted in a clearer overview of the wider safeguarding issues for the borough. The Bolton Community Strategy states that children and young people, and vulnerable people of all ages, are the priority of the authority.
131. There is a Children's Trust and a Health and Well-Being Board which work alongside the BSCB to provide strategic leadership across agencies for children and young people's services. There are good lines of accountability and communications between these bodies. However, given that both have recently been reviewed and re-established, it is too early to identify an impact on improving services for children in the borough.
132. At a time of national budget reductions, the authority has prioritised spending on children's services, resulting in budgets being appropriately sustained within safeguarding and looked after children services. The 18 children's centres funded by the authority had their budgets reduced in 2013 and were reorganised to move from supporting all children to targeting the most vulnerable in Bolton. Only two of the ten children's centres inspected to date are rated good, compared with 68% nationally. The local authority is monitoring the impact of the budget reductions on the work of the children's centres, and plans to review the effect on services in 2015.
133. The Joint Strategic Needs analysis considers children looked after and safeguarding separately, identifies national issues and evaluates provision. Future planning for looked after children is much stronger, resulting in a clearer plan for improving services and outcomes for looked after children.
134. The local authority had been refocusing its services to ensure that more children were being dealt with outside the child protection arena. However, there has been a significant and unexpected increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan over the last ten months, from 213 to 340, and this is continuing to rise. The authority has reviewed individual cases and is

satisfied that only children who need to be subject to a child protection plan are dealt with in this manner. However neither the local authority nor the BSCB fully understands the reasons behind the significant increase (63%) in such a short period of time, nor has worked with partners to address the causes.

135. The workforce strategy for social workers is good, although capacity issues for IROs have not been sufficiently addressed. Almost all posts are filled by permanent staff. There is a good trainee scheme and the vast majority of social workers report positively about the training programme. Some 62% of social workers have either completed further training (PQ) or are currently on the scheme, and this is good. The department is currently staffed 'over numbers' and this assists social workers in having manageable caseloads. Newly qualified social workers are supported well. Supervision is regular and supportive of workers, although it is not always reflective of practice. Staff morale is very good and staff are proud to work for Bolton.
136. A wide range of services are commissioned from the community and voluntary sector for vulnerable children and young people. This includes the advocacy service, family group conferences, young carers and Bolton Lads and Girls Club. Evaluation, though, focuses on the take up of services rather than improvements in outcomes. There is not as yet an overarching commissioning strategy but inspectors found good work, including the purchasing of individual placements.
137. Corporate Parenting is given a high priority. The Corporate Parenting Board and Executive Board are supported by a young people's group, Voice4U. The performance of services for looked after children and care leavers in Bolton is good compared to the national performance indicators, and young people who met inspectors were very positive about the support they receive. The importance of the corporate parenting agenda in Bolton is emphasised by a mural created by looked after children which is positioned in a local authority committee room to remind elected members of their responsibilities, and also by a high profile annual celebration of achievements.
138. Feedback from children and young people is routinely collected and used to review practice. There are few complaints. Individual learning has been identified resulting in improvements in practice. No themes were identified by the authority from this small and disparate set of complaints and this was appropriate.

## 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 local safeguarding children board**

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

#### **Areas for improvement**

139. The LSCB annual report should provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local child protection services. It should identify areas of weakness, the causes of those weaknesses and the action being taken to address them as well as other proposals for action.
140. Improve the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and their board partners individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and advise them on ways to improve.
141. Provide challenge to Greater Manchester Police to provide sufficient resources to ensure they are able to take part in all aspects of child protection work, including strategy discussions and meetings, child protection conferences and LADO meetings.
142. Extend multi-agency case auditing activity to strengthen the evaluation of the quality of multi-agency interventions, practice, cooperation and the application of thresholds, to identify key lessons for multi-agency practice and decision making.
143. Improve the attendance at child protection training and resolve the issues that have resulted in cancellation of sessions.
144. Improve the monitoring and challenge to slow progress in serious case review action plans and, where actions are recorded as met, ensure the evidence to support this is included and tested.

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

145. The LSCB has not fully evaluated and reported upon the effectiveness of local services to identify priorities for action in the annual report. As there is insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of local child protection performance, there are no comparisons to measure patterns and trends year on year and consider how to improve services.
146. Due to capacity issues, Greater Manchester Police are not routinely available for strategy discussions and meetings and attendance at child protection conferences and LADO meetings. There has not been a challenge from the LSCB on this shortfall.
147. The LSCB has only very recently secured the membership of all statutory partners on the board. This follows a period without membership from CAF/CASS due to a regional decision by the organisation not to attend these meetings. Two independent lay members are well-established and play an active role in the business of the LSCB.

148. The LSCB does not regularly undertake multi-agency case auditing activities to assess the effectiveness of multi-agency child protection practice and inform the monitoring of local performance. Some effective auditing of specific key aspects is undertaken, such as the quality of CAFs and GP reports, which has resulted in actions for agencies to improve; further sampling periodically assesses on-going progress. In some aspects progress has been slow, such as improving the quality of GP reports to initial case conferences.
149. The LSCB does not review as part of its multi-agency oversight data on children missing from home, care and education. Without this, monitoring and challenge to partnership working is not robust.
150. The LSCB responds promptly to initiating serious case reviews where necessary and publishes these for transparency as required. There are well-established arrangements for learning and disseminating lessons from both local and national Serious Case Reviews. Equally, learning from management reviews improves practice. For example, paediatricians who complete medical examinations now provide an immediate written outcome to avoid any miscommunication. The Board works closely with neighbouring LSCBs to identify any themes which may be relevant for the local area, in particular learning from child sexual exploitation operations.
151. Serious case review action plans are reviewed by the Executive Board. There have been four serious incident notifications received by Ofsted since the last inspection in March 2012, and appropriately two of these resulted in serious case reviews. Most actions from the reviews have been implemented. However, there has been insufficient challenge over the timeliness of agencies actioning recommendations, but this has been about changes to processes and has not affected the protection of children.
152. The Executive Safeguarding Board coordinates the work of the BSCB and is well attended by all partner agencies. It regularly reviews progress on business priorities; however, without a full evaluation of local child protection performance the board cannot be fully assured it has identified all the key priorities. The LSCB oversees an effective strategy and action plan to respond to child sexual exploitation. The recently increased police capacity in the Exit team is having an initial positive impact on disrupting perpetrators' activities. The team are at an early stage of collating joint intelligence to better understand the local picture and report to the LSCB.
153. Effective Pan-Manchester policies and procedures, with links to local policies, are accessible through a joint safeguarding partnership with other boroughs. These are regularly updated through a joint commissioning arrangement and the guidelines sub-group oversee relevant local updates.
154. The LSCB is currently updating the established Framework for Action to improve the effectiveness and quality of Early Help arrangements following a review by Lancaster University. The current Framework is well embedded and

commitment to early help is agreed with partners at a strategic level and operationally. In the majority of cases, children and families are well supported through early help arrangements.

155. The LSCB has a well-defined multi-agency training framework with clear objectives to train the workforce on all levels of interventions in the Framework for Action. Evaluating the impact on practice is in the very early stages, with some initial themes collated; for example, workers reporting more confidence and understanding of their role. Children's Centre staff were positive about the training on learning from serious case reviews that they had received.
156. During 2012–2013, 37 of 90 multi-agency safeguarding training sessions were cancelled due to low take up. Only 667 delegates of an expected 916 attended the sessions delivered. Sample audits have been undertaken to understand the low numbers attending this training and actions have been undertaken this year to address these issues and ensure higher attendance on courses which better matches the on-going needs of the workforce.
157. Private fostering is monitored by the board and there are regular awareness raising campaigns. Some improvements in the auditing of private fostering cases are positive, for example contacting schools and health to clarify their awareness of the child's private fostering status. Although, audits focus on process where any issues regarding the safety or welfare of children and young people are identified they are actioned immediately.
158. Accountabilities between the independent chair of the LSCB, the DCS and the Council's Chief Executive are suitably defined. The chair is supervised by the Chief Executive and also meets regularly and separately with the Director and Assistant Director to maintain and strengthen links.
159. The Child Death Overview Panel, shared with two neighbouring boroughs, is well-established and provides a good annual report which aggregates findings and identifies suitable priorities for wider safeguarding activity. The Sleep Safe campaign has successfully reduced the death rate from previous figures.

## 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.



Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, workbased learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for looked after children and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD  
T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
© Crown copyright 2014