

Swindon 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: 11 March – 2 April 2014

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<p>The overall judgement is requires improvement</p> <p>There are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children in care is safeguarded and promoted. However, the authority is not yet delivering good help, protection and care for children, young people and families.</p> <p>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	Requires improvement
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Requires improvement
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement
3. Leadership, management and governance	Requires improvement
<p>The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is good</p> <p>The LSCB coordinates the activity of statutory partners and has mechanisms in place to monitor the effectiveness of local arrangements.</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 requires improvement and is not yet good because

1. Although no children were found to be at immediate risk during the period of inspection, in a small minority of cases selected for audit, some serious practice concerns needed to be addressed. In two of these cases, the local authority had recognised the need to make court applications to secure the safety of the children.
2. In response to a significant increase in contacts and referrals, combined with a resultant increase in assessments and child protection enquiries, and children and young people becoming subject to child protection plans, the local authority has reconfigured 'front door services'. This has led to the establishment of Family Contact Point (FCP), who receive all contacts relating to children, young people and their families. The assessment and child protection service (ACP) receives referrals from FCP, and undertakes assessments and child protection enquiries. Neither team is yet fully staffed and for this reason the social workers in ACP have higher caseloads and are unable to give priority to all child in need cases. This means that some children, young people and their families have to wait for an assessment of their needs and for service provision.
3. Strategy discussions between agencies where there are child protection concerns are held mainly between children's services and the police only. The named nurse for child protection is co-located in ACP and is consulted on cases, but her input is not formally recorded. Other agencies are not routinely involved, and information is not always available from them to inform decision making. The records of strategy meetings are not always clear about decisions and actions to be taken.
4. Written plans for children who need help and protection are not always individualised to consider their specific needs. Some do not specify what needs to be done, when, or by whom. Some plans do not clearly explain what will happen if the parents do not comply with the plan.
5. In a small number of cases, Independent Review Managers (IRMs) are not rigorous or challenging enough in reducing delay and escalating issues in order to safeguard children and young people or robustly progress permanency planning.
6. The quality of social work practice is too variable. Assessments are generally comprehensive and the child's voice is well recorded and considered. However, the quality of analysis, and the use of research to inform analysis, is inconsistent. Assessments are not routinely reviewed and updated by social workers at important points in the lives of children and young people such as

episodes of care or disruption. This fails to ensure that there is contemporaneous assessment of children's and young people's needs to inform planning and support to them.

7. The information system that tells senior leaders, social workers and their managers what they are doing well and what they need to do better is not being used effectively to improve services to children and young people.
8. The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is not yet providing effective oversight of children in care and care leavers. The revised strategy, which has been endorsed by the CPB, shows that the local authority recognises this and has responded to the need to strengthen the CPB.
9. The strategic overview of child sexual exploitation (CSE) is robust. However this is not yet translated into consistently high quality and timely practice by staff working within children's services.
10. The permanency plan is currently in draft form. The local authority recognises within it that there are not enough placements to meet demand and choice, particularly for older children. This can mean that a minority of young people are in placements that initially do not fully meet their often complex needs, requiring further placement moves to achieve this.
11. Educational progress for children looked after is improving but is not yet good enough. Children who are looked after do less well than children in Swindon who are not looked after.
12. Senior leaders do not yet have the detailed plan in place to help them make sure services are constantly getting better for care leavers.

The local authority has the following strengths

13. The 'One Swindon' strategic partnership works well to provide early help to children and their families. This work is supported by the co-location of staff in multi-disciplinary teams accessible to service users. Swindon has recently sought to improve the help children, young people and their families receive as soon as they need help. The creation of the 'early help record and plan' (EHRP) in place of the common assessment framework has re-energised work in this area. Children, young people and their families, as well as agencies and schools have welcomed this initiative. The early help record gives greater focus on the child's voice and experiences, and early evidence is encouraging that the model is being used increasingly to help and support children and young people.
14. Team around the child (TAC) processes, the purpose of early help and the thresholds for services are well understood. There is good use of a range of support services, including effective work through the targeted adolescent mental health service (TAMHS), Families First and the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP).

15. Children and young people experience few changes of social workers and are able to build positive and trusting relationships with professionals they know and who get to know them. When inspectors spoke to social workers, they had a good understanding of the children they work with, and the voice of the child was evident in case recording.
16. There is evidence of innovative and bespoke packages of support and parenting advice to families, to enable them to care safely for children and young people. These support foster care placements and also promote return home plans when children have been looked after.
17. There is excellent provision of advocacy for young people involved in child protection procedures, with 98% of children over eight years old receiving independent advocacy services.
18. There are good transitional arrangements with adult services for disabled children. Social work staff in adult services are based in the disabled children's team. This ensures that needs and issues are identified at an early stage and plans made for successful transitions to adult services.
19. Good use of the public law outline (PLO) results in the right decisions being taken to protect children and young people, including removal from parental care. Although the three year average timescale for care proceedings is higher than both statistical neighbour and national averages, effective joint working with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the Family Justice Council has reduced court timescales to below 30 weeks. This good practice ensures children and young people's longer term permanency options can be secured with minimal delay.
20. The majority of children in care live in, or very near, Swindon in placements that support them well. The local authority has introduced a number of initiatives to make sure such placements can be permanent.
21. Well-embedded and mature joint commissioning arrangements, underpinned by a comprehensive suite of formal agreements under section 75 of the National Health Services Act 2006, enable fully integrated leadership under a single Service Director of health, education and social care services. These arrangements lead to secure integration and enhanced outcomes, particularly for younger children.
22. The local authority has a good range of provision for pupils who have been excluded from school or who are in danger of being excluded. The local authority is successful in preventing disruption to the education of looked after children.
23. Senior officers and members have increased funding for services in response to increased demand. Senior managers continue to provide consistent and visible leadership for children's services. Most social workers met during the inspection

reported that they were proud to be working in Swindon, and could describe effective work to improve children's lives.

24. 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.
25. The work of the adoption team is good. Post-adoption support is a very significant strength in Swindon, based on strong relationships between the adoption service and adoptive families.

What does the local authority need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

26. The inspection did not find any areas for priority and immediate action.

Areas for improvement

27. Ensure that the findings of the current CSE audit result in a robust, specific, measurable and timely plan to improve operational recognition of sexual abuse and CSE across the Borough of Swindon.
28. Ensure that, through the recruitment of agreed and additional staff, social workers' caseloads, particularly in the FCP and ACP teams, are manageable and regularly reviewed. This will enable children, young people and their families to receive services to meet assessed need in a timely manner.
29. Ensure that strategy discussions and meetings, including those managed by the local authority designated officer (LADO), clearly record actions, responsibilities and timescales and are reviewed to ensure their completion. Children and young people on a child protection plan should have a clearly individualised and separate plan to any other child in the family.
30. Ensure that managers provide regular supervision that is well recorded and enables social workers to reflect on their practice. Ensure that management oversight and case work decisions, including the rationale for such, are clearly recorded.
31. The local authority should ensure, together with the LSCB through its contacts with Wiltshire police, that there is a process for ensuring notification to social care within 24 hours of all relevant domestic violence incidents.
32. Ensure that the emergency duty service (EDS) has access to legal advice out of hours.
33. Review current service provision in relation to private fostering to increase notifications from their current low number.

34. Ensure that cultural issues and ethnic background are understood and taken into account in assessment of needs, planning and the provision of services.
35. Ensure that all care leavers have a pathway plan of high quality, and prioritise planning to raise the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training.
36. Ensure that all care leavers receive independence training to equip them with sufficient skills, such as managing money, to help them to live independently.
37. Ensure that managers routinely use performance management information to improve services for the benefit of children, young people and their families. This will require investment to improve the current electronic record in order to deliver more trusted and accurate quantitative and qualitative information.
38. Ensure that health concerns for children in care are proactively identified and addressed to so that health outcomes for all children in care can be improved.
39. Ensure that educational outcomes for individual children in care and care leavers are closely monitored, and that this information is used to set ambitious targets in order to drive up their attainment and progress.
40. Develop a targeted recruitment campaign to increase the number of carers available who can offer stable homes to older children and young people, including those with complex emotional and behavioural needs.
41. Accelerate work on embedding a robust permanency policy for all children who enter care, including a rigorous approach to training for all social workers based on recently revised procedures.
42. Ensure that all children entering care benefit from life story work at the earliest possible opportunity

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 six of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and one additional contracted inspector.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Sean Tarpey

Team inspectors: Helen Cawston, Peter McEntee, Graham Tilby, Debora Barazetti-Scott, Aelwyn Pugh, Dominic Porter Moore.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 47,100 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Swindon. This is 22.5% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 17% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 13.2% (the national average is 18.1%)
 - in secondary schools is 13.8% (the national average is 15.1%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 14.5% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British at 7.8% and Mixed at 4.5%.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 13.9% (the national average is 18.1%)
 - in secondary schools is 11.8% (the national average is 13.6%).

Child protection in this area

- At the end of February 2014, 1,470 children who were open to children's social care (this includes children who are currently being assessed) had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 1,205 at 31 March 2013
- At the end of February 2014, 217 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 147 at 31 March 2013.
- At the end of March 2013, seven children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from eight in 2011–12.

Children looked after in this area

- At the end of February 2014, 246 children were being looked after by the LA (a rate of 52.2 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 250 (53 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2013. Of this number:
 - 48 (or 19.5%) live outside the local authority area
 - 17 live in residential children's homes, (6.8% of the care population)

- there is one child currently living in a residential special school²
 - 208 live with foster families, of whom 15.4% live out of the authority area
 - seven live with parents, none of whom are out of the authority area
 - four are children who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
- there have been 19 adoptions
 - six children became subject of special guardianship orders
 - 117 children have ceased to be looked after, of whom 11.1% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - three children and young people have ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - two children and young people have ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority does not operate any children's homes.
- The previous inspection of Swindon Borough Council's safeguarding arrangements was in November 2009. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Swindon Borough Council's services for children in care was in November 2009. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The most recent inspection of adoption services was in 2009. The service's overall quality was judged to be outstanding.
- The most recent inspection of fostering services was in 2012. The service was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children's Services has been in post since March 2008. He assumed responsibility for adult services in July 2011.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since April 2010.

² 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.

43. Within Swindon, local authority services for children, including early help and social care, are fully integrated with community health services through a National Health Services Act Section 75 agreement. 200 health staff (health visitors, school nurses, speech and language therapists, paediatric therapists and nursing for children with complex needs) were transferred to the Local Authority in 2011 as part of the establishment of Early Help Teams.
44. The common assessment framework (CAF) has become increasingly less well used in the Borough as it was reported by families and agencies that it had become over bureaucratic. Despite this finding, at the end of December 2013, 23.6% of social care referrals (365 out of 1543) had been in receipt of CAF at any point (the same as in 2011–12). With a higher rate of CAF activity in 2011–12, and a higher rate of referrals currently, this reflects a significantly improving position of ensuring children and families receive early help before entering statutory services.
45. In response to agency concerns regarding CAF, reinforced by a Safeguarding Board audit, Swindon has recently re-focused the way it identifies early help needs through the creation of an 'early help record and plan'. Agencies and schools have welcomed this initiative, which ensures a greater focus on the child's voice and experiences. Early indications are that there will be increased usage of the record and as a result more children, young people and their families will receive timely help.
46. Team around the child processes and the purpose of early help is well understood by agencies and staff and there is effective use of a wide range of support services such as targeted mental health services (TAMHS). A key element in the local authority's early help offer is the provision of places for two-year-olds at children's centres. Swindon is the third best performing local authority in the country in terms of the number of children benefitting from this offer. Work seen during this inspection showed that the children's centres work very closely with a range of agencies to provide early help. When this has not brought about sufficient improvement, timely referral is made to children's social care services. Early help records seen are of good quality, with evidence of the family and young person being well engaged with offers of services as a result.
47. Close collaborative working between the local authority and a wide range of agencies is also ensuring that almost 300 troubled families receive effective help to tackle the problems that they encounter. Two claims have been made to date for the payment by results element of the programme for 34 families who achieved and sustained the outcomes for a minimum of six months.

48. The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is highly effective in supporting young parents and their babies. 220 clients have been assisted on the Programme which is currently working with 94 families. The team have strong links with social care, other partners and the named nurse for child protection. This promotes a culture of information sharing and opportunities for discussing concerns as well as joint working.
49. The creation of Family Contact Point (FCP) is a positive response to rising numbers of contacts and referrals. The service provides an effective triage service dealing with up to 600 contacts a month. Referrals made to the service are appropriate and show a borough-wide understanding of thresholds. There is appropriate sign-posting to early help and clear identification of statutory child protection work. Good use is made of co-located health and police staff to ensure that decisions on further actions are made using as much information as possible. Parental consent is routinely obtained and well recorded.
50. Unqualified staff within the FCP triage contacts on occasion make decisions about 'no further action' without qualified social worker or managerial oversight. In samples of work dealt with in this way no detriment to children and families was seen; the local authority audits the appropriateness of this work and has established low thresholds for case consultations.
51. Most contacts, including all child protection referrals seen, are passed to the ACP team within 24 hours. However, not all contacts are closed, referred elsewhere or progressed to referral in this timescale, remaining in the FCP for longer periods. This delays decisions, assessment of need and potentially the provision of services to children and young people at the earliest opportunity.
52. Initial assessments are often detailed but too many lack analysis. There is little evidence of the use of research despite staff having access to research resources. Most assessments take account of the history of involvement of services. Children who have a social worker are mostly seen at regular intervals and, where appropriate, seen alone. There is good evidence in case files that bedrooms and living areas are seen by workers. The voice of the child is clearly evident in case files and social workers understand the importance of hearing a child's wishes and feelings, which are taken into account in planning. A range of tools are used to gather young people's feelings and views to inform assessments. For example, the use of 'three houses', which is an activity that helps children to describe their current concerns and what they want to happen in the future.
53. Child protection enquiries are mostly thorough and children and young people are not subject unnecessarily to child protection procedures. Strategy discussions are routinely held although often with only the police. Although the named nurse for child protection is co-located in ACP and informs decision making, her input is not formally recorded, which is a deficit. Recording of strategy discussions is variable with some examples seen where decisions and timescales were unclear. This reflects a general finding that practice is better

than that which is recorded. As the emergency duty service (EDS) rely on these records to inform their work, it is important that records are both accessible and clear.

54. The majority of child protection case conferences and child protection reviews are timely. The local authority has improved performance in this area and now compares favourably with statistical neighbours. Swindon has adopted the Signs of Safety methodology, which is a strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection casework. This approach has secured parents' engagement, giving them a clear understanding of harm and safety goals linked to a plan. Parents with learning disabilities confirm (through the advocacy service) that they have a clearer understanding of what people are concerned about and what needs to change. There is good evidence of effective safety planning with families using the Signs of Safety model, although not all child protection plans are sufficiently well developed by core groups. Conference chairs need to improve focus on the effectiveness of core groups to strengthen the effectiveness of child protection plans.
55. Child protection core groups take place on a regular basis. However, some examples seen lack focus on the child protection plan and were poorly recorded, with actions and timescales unclear. Contingency planning is not well articulated, and in some cases it was unclear what the plan was. Different children who are on child protection plans in the same family do not always have an individual plan. This means that their individual needs are not explicitly identified and taken into account in work to minimise risk and measure progress.
56. In the large majority of cases safety and protective factors for children and young people are clearly identified. In a small minority of cases, however, plans are less clear, lacking timescales and clearly defined actions. Through a lack of management oversight, authoritative action has not always been taken in a timely manner to ensure that a small minority of children on children in need plans become subject to child protection plans or enter care at the right time. This has inhibited robust planning for a small minority of children and young people as it delays the addressing of risk for a longer period than is necessary. During the inspection, recent practice demonstrated a more rigorous approach and oversight.
57. Children are protected by well-attended multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) chaired by a senior police officer, and a multi-agency risk panel (MARP) which seeks to identify and protect young people deemed to be very vulnerable.
58. The police operate a risk assessment process for domestic violence incidents and pass all high and medium risk notifications to the FCP within 24 hours. However, other notifications assessed as low risk are not passed to children's social care services in this timescale. In a small minority of cases, it can be several weeks before these notifications are received by the children's social

care service. This practice does not enable the local authority to adequately assess overall risk within a reasonable timescale. A proposal to remedy this with the introduction of a daily contact process with the police has been delayed on a number of occasions as police configure resources.

59. The Emergency Duty Service (EDS) is co-located with the FCP and has sufficient expertise and capacity to work effectively. EDS undertakes welfare checks and unannounced visits out of hours and at weekends to families of concern. The service has good access to senior managers to aid decision making but does not have a facility for seeking legal advice out of hours.
60. The MARP has been successful in bringing together key agencies who work with children and young people considered 'high risk'. The panel meets monthly and cases are referred using the Swindon Vulnerability Checklist. The Panel develops detailed multi-agency risk management plans for each young person at risk of sexual exploitation or other risks such as missing. Plans are subject to regular review. The Panel has met nine times from May 2013 to January 2014 and has discussed 20 young people. While the risks to young people of child sexual abuse and exploitation are understood by staff, in some cases seen, interventions have been ineffective and plans not changed when concerns remained or increased. The panel is more effective in maintaining an operational overview of issues such as the sharing of information on alleged perpetrators of sexual exploitation.
61. Visits to children and young people are taking place according to statutory requirements. Most recording is good quality, with detailed information relating to the child's current experiences. However recording does not routinely demonstrate that visits were undertaken with a clear purpose related to the child's plan.
62. All reports from the police of missing children are received by FCP and those that do not reach the threshold for a social care initial assessment are referred to early help services within the integrated locality teams. The social care lead for missing children meets each month with the Police Missing Persons Coordinator to monitor and review the data and ensure that actions have been put in place, including return interviews for each child where appropriate. Those at the highest risk are also reviewed at the Multi-Agency Risk Panel. The LSCB funds an advocacy service to provide independent return home interviews for missing children. The combination of these services is having a beneficial impact on reducing the number of young people going missing by 22% and a significant reduction by 50% of children in care going missing.
63. The local authority has a good range of provision for pupils who have been excluded from school or who are in danger of being excluded. The criteria are clear for determining access to the different types of provision and for monitoring the progress of young people within each placement. The local authority also commissions imaginative additional services to provide further support for children who find it difficult to engage in mainstream educational

provision. There are good systems for tracking and monitoring the impact of provision and considerable focus is placed on enabling young people within alternative provision to gain accredited qualifications.

64. The fair access panel for secondary schools is well developed and, through the use of managed moves, has been successful in reducing the number of permanent exclusions by half (26 to 13). Over the same period, the rates of re-integration into mainstream education have more than doubled (8 to 17).
65. Clear systems are in place for supporting and monitoring families who elect to educate their children at home. Good use is made of monitoring data. The local authority has not hesitated to tackle situations where the quality of education provided has been inadequate.
66. The local authority undertakes a number of measures to ensure that young people who are privately fostered are identified, assessed and offered support. Numbers of such arrangements identified in Swindon is low. While there are a number of publicity initiatives, the quality of private fostering work is variable, with examples seen where visits are not within timescales. There is a lack of senior management oversight of this area of work to drive required improvements, not least to increase recognition.
67. The management of allegations through the LADO arrangements does not always demonstrate rigour in assessment and conclusions. The annual report does not provide adequate information to enable an informed analysis of work undertaken and its impact. For example, the report does not detail types of allegation made and does not link these to agency, services and outcomes. This impedes the identification of trends and service planning or training.
68. There is laudable use of advocacy services for young people involved in child protection procedures, with a figure of 98% of children over eight years old receiving advocacy services. The advocacy service is provided by an independent agency and is an opt out rather than opt in service. Children, young people and their families report favourably on the support of the service. Good examples have been seen of the use of advocacy in case conferences. Parents and carers with learning disabilities also benefit from access to advocacy through the Swindon Advocacy Movement (SAM).
69. Assessments and planning in cases do not routinely take into account cultural and ethnic background issues. This means that planning in these cases is not fully informed about a child's needs. There are good transitional arrangements with adult services for children with disabilities. Adults' services social work staff based in the disabled children's team ensure that needs and issues are identified at an early stage and plans made for service continuation.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence require improvement.

70. Effective processes are becoming increasingly embedded for making decisions about when children should become looked after. These include the recent review of the Placement Panel. The Panel has a wide membership of relevant professionals, including the designated looked after children's nurse, an education representative, early help and family placement team managers as well as a care package co-ordinator. The panel meets to consider whether entry to care is the best pathway for a child or young person, or whether there are other ways they may be supported to remain at home or with their family members.
71. Some young people may enter care via the EDS service. Sometimes the needs of the child or young person are not fully known at the time of the first placement. Most children and young people placed on an emergency basis are placed with in-house foster carers where assessments of their needs can continue more easily. However there is not always a choice of placement for children and young people who are admitted into care in this manner.
72. A high proportion of children and young people in Swindon live in foster placements approved by the authority, with 89% living within 20 miles of their family home. This is a good example of the local authority's determination to place children and young people within their local area. This represents good practice as it ensures there is minimal disruption to existing family, education and community networks for children and young people who enter care.
73. Specialised provision, including out of authority placements, is commissioned through trusted providers where due regard is given to the latest Ofsted inspection judgement. If judgements decline, consideration is given to a placement move if this is in accordance with the wishes of the child and deemed in their best interests. As at the end of March, there were 20 children in residential care and 27 in independent fostering placements, of which 39 are in good or outstanding provision. The remaining eight are in adequate provision and no child is currently placed in a setting that is judged to be inadequate. Providers spoken to during the inspection were generally complimentary of the work of the local authority and felt social workers supported children and young people well.
74. The quality of foster care placements is high, with mandatory training in place to ensure foster carers develop knowledge and skills to assist them in their work. The fostering panel provides a good level of scrutiny in considering applications from prospective carers, and challenges applications where appropriate. Foster carers state that they feel well supported by their supervising social workers and have confidence that they will get the help they need from people who know them well at any time of day or night, as there is always someone from the family placement team on call.
75. Children experience a lower number of placement moves than the national or statistical neighbour averages. However, a lack of choice, particularly in teenage placements, means that a very small minority of young people are

placed at least initially in homes or settings which are not able to meet their sometimes complex emotional or behavioural needs. This makes placement breakdown more likely in this cohort. Although the local authority recognises this deficiency, there is currently no targeted recruitment of foster carers with skills in working with teenagers.

76. Inspectors saw evidence of innovative and bespoke packages of support to enable families to care safely for children and young people and support planned reunification when children have been looked after.
77. There is good use of the public law outline (PLO). Although the three year average timescale for care proceedings is higher than both the statistical neighbour and national average, effective joint working with Cafcass and the Family Justice Council has had the impact of reducing court timescales to below 30 weeks in the last quarter of 2013. This ensures that children and young people are safeguarded by court orders and enables the local authority to consider the range of permanency options most suited to the needs of each child or young person in a timely manner.
78. In the majority of casework reviewed, children and young people are seen and seen alone by their social workers who, in most cases, know them very well and work hard to understand their needs. Where there is an up to date core assessment, this helps to guide effective planning, but core assessments are not routinely updated where there are changes in children's lives. Care plans are not always robust, and permanence plans at the second review are not always in place. All these factors contribute incrementally to delay and insufficiently robust planning that is both avoidable and potentially detrimental to children and young people.
79. Advocacy services are available for all children in care and young people over seven years of age. This is an opt in service and not all choose to take up the service (81 out of 250), which means that some children and young people are not having their views independently represented at decision-making meetings. Limited links with independent visitors were seen, even where contact with parents is not in place. The potential need for an independent visitor is not always recorded in review discussions. Children and young people coming into care for the first time are given a helpful pack of information with details of how to access advocacy, and how to complain. For younger children in particular, the information is not presented in a very child-friendly manner, so they may not always understand it.
80. The Children in Care Council (CICC) meets monthly. The Council is a small group of children in care (some of whom are care leavers) who enjoy spending time together and working on questions from or feedback to elected members and officers on specific issues. Participation workers support the children in care council well and it is actively helping to improve services. For example, profiles of foster carers have been created that can be shared with children and young people in order that they have some knowledge of the carers and their families

with whom they may be placed. However, the group is not representative of all children in care in Swindon as they do not consult more widely in making suggestions or responding to questions from elected members or officers. At present there is not an established group for under 12's or for children with disabilities, although some bespoke events are held to engage them.

81. The CICC contributed to the Corporate Parenting Strategy with an agreed set of pledges to which the local authority has committed. Representatives of the CICC who met with inspectors were unclear and confused about the pledge although, when prompted by support workers, remembered to contributing to its development some time ago. A comprehensive Swindon Plan for Children in Care and Care Leavers is being developed and a draft is due to be taken to the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2014.
82. Although there are some good strategic initiatives to track children and young people who are missing, and to identify and protect those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, it is not clear that social workers always recognise the risks and know what to do to safeguard children. In a small minority of cases seen by inspectors, looked after young people had clearly been exposed to sexual harm which was not recognised quickly enough. The local authority has since taken decisive and robust actions to safeguard these young people and is currently auditing all cases across the Borough where sexual abuse or exploitation may be a feature.
83. Outcomes for looked after children and young people in respect of their health, education, and offending rates are monitored by the looked after children's nurse, the looked after children educational service (LACES) and the youth offending team (YOT) respectively. Further work is required to secure improvements in practice through setting targets and more robust tracking of children in care. Whether children are placed within or outside Swindon, there are effective arrangements to ensure their basic health and education needs are met in most instances. However, there are too many children and young people over 10 who have been in care for more than a year who have a caution or conviction (10% of the care population compared to 6% of national LAC average). The comparatively low number of children in care (CIC) in Swindon coupled with the over-representation of teenagers amongst CIC affect this statistic. However, taken alongside other indicators, this contributes to poorer outcomes for young people who have a care history.
84. The timeliness of health assessments and dental care for children and young people in care, and the completion rates of strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ), can be improved. SDQ's are reported, but are not robustly analysed. The most recent report (March 2013) does not make suggestions as to how outcomes could be improved. For example, it is acknowledged that the number of young people in care who are known to have a substance use problem is likely to be an underestimate, but there are no actions with timescales for addressing this and ensuring that help is available to all who may need it. Some services are effective, such as the joint working with

CAMHS. Foster carers report that access to CAMHS for consultations and initial assessments is fast tracked, and helpful in understanding children's needs and approaches to best meet these.

85. The local authority is successful in preventing disruption to the education of looked after children. Sustained measures to ensure that no looked after child is permanently excluded have been in place for the past ten years. The most recent figures also show that attendance at school by children in care of primary age is above average (97%). At secondary level, however, at 93.3% it is below the national average of 95.4%. Although very few change schools more than once, even when they move home several times, not all of them attend a good school (82% LAC of primary age and 65% of those of secondary age attend a school that is good or better).
86. The number of children in care in the borough who take examinations is too small to allow for detailed comparisons between their educational performance and that of children in care across the country. The most recent report gives a detailed analysis of why children in particular year groups have not achieved well but suggests that too little has been expected of them. Senior managers have recognised this and the virtual school and educational support team are now being aligned more closely to school improvement services in order to provide greater challenge to improve educational outcomes.
87. Children in care are supported by additional fostering fees and the use of the pupil premium to attend a range of extra-curricular activities including sport, dance, and music lessons. However while foster carers have discounted access, children and young people do not have an automatic entitlement to a free leisure pass. This might encourage a higher take-up of leisure services, enabling them to develop wider interests, increase friendship circles and improve health outcomes, all of which help to develop resilience.
88. Children are well supported to develop attachments with carers whilst maintaining contact with parents, brothers and sisters. For some children, this has resulted in long-term fostering and special guardianship arrangements achieving permanence. Effective parallel adoption planning is increasingly in place, which means that the search for potential adopters can begin while assessments of the birth family are taking place during legal proceedings. The use of parallel planning has enabled some young children to be placed for adoption in accordance with recommended timescales.
89. A permanence culture where plans for adoption and other permanence options are put in place for all children at the earliest opportunity is yet to be embedded. The current draft permanency policy does not clearly identify the approach that is necessary to achieve this, and would benefit from being updated. There is insufficient rigour and challenge from Independent Review Managers (IRM) in reducing delay and escalating issues in order to progress permanency plans in a timely manner. The IRM service has only recently

developed a quality assurance framework to monitor and track quality and performance for all children and young people who are looked after.

90. Life story work is not routinely undertaken with children entering the care system, and tends to be progressed when children have a permanent plan that does not involve returning to their birth family. There are some good examples of life story work being undertaken by foster carers and social workers, but this is not consistent throughout the child's journey in care.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is good.

91. Adoption is increasingly being considered at an early stage in case planning for the vast majority of children where a return home to their birth family would be unsafe or would not satisfactorily meet their needs. The use of the PLO and effective collaboration through the local pre-proceedings protocol has resulted in significant improvements to concluding care proceedings in a timely way. Consequently there is an improving trend in terms of the average time between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family. The newly established court team is an example of the local authority's determination to further improve the timeliness and consistency of court work and the use of parallel planning for children.
92. Management oversight of the child's timetable for adoption is generally good, but case tracking is weakened by the lack of effective and robust electronic systems. This inhibits the service manager's ability to fully analyse any potential delays and target action as part of a whole systems approach to permanence planning. To compensate for this, the service has adopted alternative systems to ensure that children's progress is individually tracked. The local authority's intention to re-define the role of the Permanency Panel aims to further improve management oversight and accelerate progress in respect of permanence options for children.
93. In 2013–14, of the 16 children placed for adoption, over 90% were placed within 12 months of the adoption order being made. The local authority has been successful in enabling older children to be adopted, with 25% of those adopted during 2013–14 aged between 10 and 17 years. Matching is effective and there have been no adoption disruptions involving Swindon children in the last three years.
94. The national adoption grant funding is being used effectively to enhance the capacity of a well-established and highly experienced adoption service. Adoption social workers provide a generic service responding to initial enquiries, undertaking assessments and training of prospective adopters. They act as links to matching and provide post-adoption support. This promotes continuity and means that adoptive families feel comfortable in approaching different members of the team for advice and support. The team receives informal support and regular supervision from an experienced manager. There is a strong commitment to improve the service based on feedback from adoptive

families and professionals which, for example, has contributed to the training programme.

95. The local authority works well to assess and approve adopters. 29 adopters were assessed and approved during 2013–14, compared to 19 in 2012–13, which represents a 52% increase. The number of children and young people placed for adoption is less than the number of adopters approved, and for issues of safety some children and young people are placed for adoption out of the Borough. For this reason Swindon contributes very effectively to enlarging the national pool of adopters. Good support is provided to adoptive families where other local authorities have placed children with adopters approved by Swindon.
96. Prospective adopters report very positively about the information available upon initial enquiry and the preparation and training they have received prior to being approved. Prospective adopters routinely highlight the professionalism, knowledge and support of the team, underpinned by comprehensive and clear information throughout the process. Events involve adopters, extended family members and referees to ensure that adoption is understood by all those involved in the process.
97. The implementation of the new Stage 1 and Stage 2 adoption process is supporting the authority in responding to and completing family assessments in a more timely way. Whilst the current population of Swindon is not particularly diverse, which is reflected in the profile of children who have been adopted in the last 12 months, managers are aware of the need to recruit adopters from a range of backgrounds. This is reflected in the diverse background of the current cohort of prospective adopters who are completing the current assessment process. A range of effective recruitment methods are used to recruit adopters and foster carers, including the use of local media and promotional videos.
98. The quality of Prospective Adopters Reports (PAR) presented to the Adoption Panel by adoption workers is good and they comprehensively identify the issues to be considered by the panel. However, the quality of Child Permanence Reports (CPR) presented to the panel by the child's social worker is more variable. This means that the Adoption Panel may not always be presented with the most up-to-date information about the child's circumstances. Adoption procedures have been revised recently and these present an opportunity to deliver a comprehensive training programme to fieldwork social workers, utilising the expertise within the adoption service about what works well for children who have been adopted. This will support social workers in preparing more effective permanency reports.
99. The Adoption Panel has a stable and balanced membership and benefits from an experienced independent chairperson. The panel demonstrates strong challenge in forming recommendations about whether prospective adopters should be approved and in matching children with adoptive families. Panel minutes are comprehensive and provide a summary of the strengths of the

prospective adoptive family as well as areas for discussion. Adopters who reflect on their experience of attending the panel consistently describe this as 'well informed, relevant to their circumstances and thorough'.

100. Panel members benefit from specific training and the opportunity to learn about outcomes for children or prospective adopters following their consideration at the panel. The panel and agency decision maker ensure that the right children are matched with appropriate adoptive families, with good support from medical and legal advisors. The service should consider more regular meetings between the independent adoption panel chairperson and the agency decision maker to enable a more strategic oversight of adoption performance and outcomes for children.
101. Although the local authority has yet to implement a formal 'fostering to adopt' scheme, it has been successful in securing permanency for some children by approving their foster carers as adoptive parents. Of the 16 children adopted during 2013–14, four were adopted by their foster carers. Local un-validated data indicates that 75% of children adopted in 2013–14 waited less than 20 months from entering care to being placed with their adoptive family, which indicates an improving trend from the 2010–12 average of 51% (Department of Education Adoption Scorecard, January 2014). Of the 10 children subject to placement orders who have yet to be matched at the time of the inspection, seven are subject to active family-finding. The vast majority of decisions to place these children for adoption have taken place within the eight months preceding this inspection.
102. Preparation of children for adoption, through creative life story books undertaken by foster carers and social workers is good. The quality of life story books seen is good. However, this is not routinely in place for all children entering care and tends to be undertaken when a child is made subject to a permanence plan that does not involve returning home. Consequently, some children who are adopted may not have access in later life to all information about their earlier experiences in care. The recently revised adoption procedures include good practice templates for later life letters to assist social workers with this task.
103. Family finding to pursue matching a child with an adoptive family is traditionally undertaken using a range of options such as the South-West Adoption Consortium, National Adoption Register and Adoptions UK's family finding service 'Children Who Wait'. When separation of brothers and sisters is considered, this is underpinned by good specialist assessments. As well as promoting the attendance of approved adopters at regionally organised adoption activity events, local adoption parties are being piloted in Swindon and there is some early indication of this leading to improved matching with children.
104. There are well-managed letterbox contact arrangements with 52 children benefitting from the opportunity to share and receive information from their

birth families during 2013–14. A review of these arrangements to seek feedback from adopters and birth families is planned to enable the local authority to learn and implement further improvements to the service.

105. Post-adoption support is a particular strength of the adoption service and developed out of strong relationships that have been fostered with adoptive families. Individually tailored packages of support are developed well in response to need. The team has developed strong links with CAMHS and the children in care education service (the virtual school), which work closely with schools to enable them to provide good support to children prior to and after being adopted. Individual sessions on attachment are provided by a child psychologist to support families. The Children & Families Intervention Team (CFIT) and the work of the care package facilitator have contributed to preventing adoption breakdowns. Good training is also available for adoptive families and foster carers and evaluations of these are positive in terms of impacting on the care of adopted children and those who are moving on to adoption.
106. Adoptive families are further supported by an on-going range of social activities and a regular newsletter keeping them up-to-date with national and local developments, for example advising adopters about the new pupil premium for adopted children. Adoptive families benefit from opportunities to network and this promotes access to individual post-adoption support. There are groups for teenage girls and an Adoptive Parents Group which contribute to improving the service. The local authority commissions the South West Adoption Network and Adoption UK to provide help and support to adopted children and their families, and to birth families. Adoptive families feel well supported to achieve good outcomes for children who have been placed with them.

The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers is requires improvement.

107. The local authority recognises that services to care leavers require improvement. An audit is currently being conducted to identify ways to ensure greater continuity for young people as they move from being in care to taking increasing responsibility for themselves as care leavers. Among the changes being explored are improved processes to ensure more timely transfer of information from the children in care service to the Care Leaving Team (Route 16+). There is also a review of the role of the Looked After Children's nurse in order to contribute more effectively to care and pathway plans. However, at present there is no overall action plan to indicate precisely how such changes will be achieved, by whom and in what time frame.
108. A very small minority (less than 5%) of care leavers do not have a pathway plan. The pathway plans that have been completed vary in the depth and usefulness of the information they include. Due to the systems used for record keeping, it is not easy for young people to trace the history of their care episode(s), nor for those who are supporting them into adulthood. Not all

young people are directly involved in pathway planning meetings and the plans seen did not always include the views of those to whom they related.

109. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors were generally complimentary about the help they had received from their social workers and personal advisers although, in some cases, changes of worker meant that support had not always been consistent. A good range of initiatives are in place to support young people to move into adulthood with support. These include the 'staying put' policy where young people are encouraged to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 years. Similarly, those who attend higher education are supported by personal advisers until they reach the age of 25. The local authority has also ensured that there is an increasing number of foster carers who can provide supported lodgings for young people in the year before their 17th birthday.
110. Young people have access to a good range of different types of housing including supported lodgings, hostels, emergency accommodation and accommodation specifically intended for those with special needs and disabilities. The local authority does make a limited use of bed and breakfast accommodation within and outside the borough. These placements are used for a maximum of eight weeks. The local authority checks that such accommodation is suitable. In the case of new landlords, checks are also informed by police records. At the time of the inspection, there were two care leavers in bed and breakfast accommodation for emergency reasons.
111. Most of the young people who spoke to inspectors were happy with where they lived and said that they felt safe, although several were in private tenancies that they had found for themselves. Some described limited contact with their neighbours but did not feel isolated where they were living. Their social care workers had visited them at the required times to check on the quality of the accommodation. Where this was not considered to be of sufficiently high standard, the young people concerned had been re-housed.
112. Not all care leavers spoken to felt that they had been prepared sufficiently well to live alone or had received sufficient support in developing skills of cooking, cleaning and financial management. This was despite the fact that the local authority employs outreach workers to support the development of independent living. Young people interviewed reported that they had been provided with help and the care leaver's grant to which they were entitled in setting up home.
113. Some of the care leavers who spoke to inspectors were not aware of the processes for making a complaint if they were unhappy with the support they were receiving.
114. Most of the care leavers who met the inspectors were registered with a medical and dental practice but they did not always choose to make best use of these services or access them as required. This was also the case for the young people whose pathway plans were examined. The local authority recognises the

need to improve the quality of health services, including mental health services, for care leavers, particularly those who are most difficult to reach.

115. The local authority celebrates the achievements of care leavers in a number of ways through regular high profile events which are appreciated by the young people concerned. However, not all the young people are nominated for awards at such events which precludes their invitation. A more innovative approach by social workers and others may provide further opportunities for increased inclusivity.
116. The proportion of care leavers who are not in employment, education or training increases as they get older so that, at the age of 18, it is over twice the figure for all the young people locally. The local authority has been slow to tackle this issue. A recently produced Skills and Employment Strategy has been developed and adopted by the authority in which it commits to ensure supported routes into employment for care leavers to maximise their potential to successfully enter the job market. The strategy recognises that more care leavers need to be supported to maximise the opportunities to take up and successfully sustain an apprenticeship if that is the best route for them. The impact of this strategy is yet to be seen.
117. The number of care leavers in university is low (8) and the local authority does not monitor the progress of care leavers in further and higher education. Those young people who stay in full-time education beyond the age of 16 or who go on to university or higher education receive the bursaries to which they are entitled. They also have appropriate support from a personal adviser.

Leadership, management and governance requires improvement.

118. Elected members and senior managers carry out their individual duties and collective statutory responsibilities well, with safeguarding of children and young people a key priority. The authority has committed significant additional resources to increase capacity within children's services. There have been significant changes to the senior management structure following the retirement and promotion of key personnel. This has enabled existing and newer managers to better understand the service. Where there is weakness in service delivery robust action is being taken to improve practice and performance. For example, a significant increase in referrals to children's services and delays in completing initial assessments prompted a swift response by senior managers, who brought forward the restructure and implementation of a new front door service as a single point of access for all contacts and referrals to children's services.
119. The Director for Children's Services and the senior management team are influential contributors to the authority's strategic direction established through 'One Swindon' and underpinned by its 'Stronger Together' vision. The Director has been instrumental in securing the continued commitment of partner agencies for financial investment in children's services. The belief and

enthusiasm for effective joint commissioning arrangements has, over the last two years, led to an effective and integrated Health and Social Care Service. There is more work to do to ensure that the partnership is fully committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough. For example, the authority must encourage local business partners to be more ambitious and to support the authority in securing work-based placements and apprenticeships for CIC and care leavers.

120. A children's service position statement effectively sets out the local authority's and partner agencies' current assessments of a child's journey through Swindon from universal services, early help to specialist services. This statement is well known and understood, recognising areas for improvement that are ongoing or planned. The statement acts as a barometer to assess how effective the authority will be in meeting the needs of children at every stage of their journey.
121. Strong and effective links are in place between the Chief Executive, the Lead Member, the DCS and SSCB Chair. Arrangements work well to ensure that the messages from front line practice are known across all the different governance arrangements in place. However, deficiencies in the current electronic recording system, including the distrust and non-compliance of some social workers, act as a barrier to an effective performance management framework. Information is not sufficiently robust to ensure that an accurate picture is gained, in particular qualitative outcomes for children and young people. A corporate strategy with committed funding is in place to address this local authority priority.
122. Suitable governance arrangements are in place. The Children's Trust is independently chaired. It receives appropriate reports, and minutes show that there is sufficient challenge to senior managers. The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee focuses well on key areas, and planned work streams for 2014 include an in-depth analysis of Out of Borough placements, CSE and a review of the Trouble Families Programme.
123. The Lead Member is a strong advocate for children services. She expresses a high level of confidence in the DCS and the senior management team in delivering effective services for children and families. She has high aspirations for all children and young people and knows there is more work to do to ensure the authority achieves improved outcomes for all children. She shares with the DCS the belief that the very recent appointment of a new Head of Service aligned to the finding of this inspection report will provide the blueprint for the authority in prioritising areas for challenge and improvement going forward.
124. Priorities for children's services are based on a detailed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment currently being refreshed. Robust analysis in 2011 of children, children in care and children in need has led to an improvement in the way services are effectively delivered through the joint commissioning arrangements. Services are integrated and the co-location of health, education

and social care staff within children's services means there is less duplication in the delivery of services to children and families and more opportunities for collaboration, for example joint training. The decision to transfer health care professionals across to social care illustrates the partnership's confidence in providing an integrated health and social care service through section 75 agreements. A range of effective commissioned services support the local authority in providing targeted early help to children. These enable families to build resilience and work towards less dependency on the use of statutory services. The Strengthening Families programme supports professionals to identify potential problems early, seek alternative options to care, and to manage risk more effectively in the community. This approach to working with families at an early stage when needs are identified is effectively embedded in practice. Where commissioned services have fallen short in delivering good outcomes for children and young people, the local authority has been robust in their approach to re-commissioning a service from a more suitable provider who can meet their needs and provide a more timely service to children and families.

125. The recent introduction of the post of care package facilitator is designed to create bespoke care arrangements for children on the cusp of care and at risk of needing statutory services. The impact of the role on helping to keep children safe within their own families and reduce the financial burden of using costly statutory services is currently being evaluated. Senior managers are confident it is a step in the right direction and will reduce the overall looked after population in the long term.
126. Providing sufficient and suitable in-house placements for older children in care and care leavers remains a challenge for the local authority. Work on CSE has heightened awareness across the system and the preponderance of teenage care entrants are 16-year-old white girls. The rising number of older children needing care means that this is now a priority and requires robust targeted recruitment activity.
127. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Board requires improvement to ensure that it provides effective challenge to children's services and other partner agencies for children in care and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Strategy establishes key principles and recognises the crucial role the local authority has as corporate parents. It provides a clear link to the priorities set out in the Health and Wellbeing strategy to ensure that all children in Swindon have the best start in life. Senior officers in children's services act as advisors and attend the quarterly meetings. However, the Board's current understanding of the key strengths and challenges faced by children in care and the services provided for them is limited. A shortfall in adequate preparation and training for the role as a corporate parent is severely restricting the capacity for board members to contribute effectively to the looked after agenda. As a consequence they are not able to monitor the delivery of some key aspects of the service, for example the permanency arrangements for children and young people, and to provide effective challenge.

128. Participation by young people at a strategic level is well embedded in practice. Presentations to strategic boards by Members of the Youth Parliament and by young people who access commissioned services ensure that the voice of children and young people are an integral part of service development. For example, building on the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy, a number of young people attended a recent Children's Trust meeting to raise awareness of how, by attending locally organised sport clubs, children and young people can help reduce obesity and improve their health by increasing their levels of activity. This serves to support the authority's Strengthening Families programme.
129. The Youth Forum, made up of representatives from schools across the Borough, has supported the development of the Children and Young People's Early Support Strategy 2013–16 ensuring the presentation and language used was child and young person friendly. The forum has previously considered bullying a priority. Children in care were able to articulate the service's commitment to keeping them safe and to tackling bullying and discrimination.
130. The use of performance management information in the local authority requires further development. Although a suite of performance information is collated and reported at all levels of the service it fails to robustly support improvements in performance and practice. The electronic information system does not support data collection effectively, and is dependent on a significant staffing resource to update and cleanse data to ensure that it is accurate. Some managers distrust the systems in place and are seen to track the quality of practice and decision making using manual processes. For example, the adoption service tracks family finding activity using a visual board placed on the office wall. There is a lack of confidence in the electronic systems that are designed to support managers in performance managing staff and monitoring outcomes for children and young people. Plans are in place and investment has been secured to address the technical issues corporately, while the second phase of the Strengthening Families initiative seeks to ensure routine compliance with system requirements.
131. The strategic overview of CSE is well embedded across the partnership, with some effective practices taking place to share information about vulnerable young people and disrupt patterns of activities. A dedicated post within children's services links directly with other agencies and service providers to support a coherent approach to the CSE strategy. Awareness raising of CSE is on-going across the partnership, including amongst hoteliers and other providers of night time services such as taxi drivers and takeaway outlets.
132. Highly vulnerable young people identified as being at risk are discussed at the monthly Multi-Agency Risk Panel (MARP). Through the dedicated CSE worker, social workers will discuss referrals they will present at the panel so that action plans are established and the level of risk is appropriately identified and shared with all agencies. Whilst there is confidence in the strategic overview of CSE, it is less clear how social workers respond to referrals where CSE is an emerging

factor and connected friends and groups of children are implicated in the information. In response to concerns expressed by inspectors in relation to a small minority of cases where it was identified that children and young people may be at risk, the local authority commissioned an audit of current casework. This scoping audit confirms a current disconnect between strategy and practice. The findings highlighted a need to accelerate practice developments in this and the local authority has appropriately revised the initial terms of reference of the CSE audit to extend more widely across all of the provision of children's social care.

133. To support social workers in understanding the complexities of CSE, the LSCB have commissioned a theatre company to present a play called Chelsea's Choice to help professionals and carers to understand the issues more clearly and support the early identification of risk. The play will also be shown to most Year 8 pupils in the borough, with nine of 11 secondary schools hosting the play and associated workshops.
134. The role of the Principal Social Worker supports the organisation's workforce development programme. However, the impact of the role in driving improvement and achieving a consistent approach to social work practice is yet to be seen. Routine case file audits, practice observations learning from complaints and thematic 'deep dives' alongside the implementation of the Signs of Safety are helping to support improvement in social work practice. However, the quality of practice, in particular written assessments and plans, remains too variable.
135. The level of management oversight in case files requires improvement to ensure that decisions made are robust and support social worker practice to safeguard children and young people. The regularity, recording and quality of supervision is inconsistent. Where it is good and well evidenced, it informs practice and is highly valued by social workers.
136. Social worker caseloads are too high, particularly in FCP and ACP teams. Neither team is yet fully staffed and for this reason the social workers in ACP have higher caseloads and are unable to give priority to all child in need cases. Some social workers consistently informed inspectors that they carried responsibility for between 33 and 39 children and families with varying degrees of complexity. While senior managers recognise this impacts on the ability of the service to ensure all children receive a timely response, it also explains why the quality of social worker practice can at times be adversely affected. Reducing caseloads in a service that is seeing a higher number of referrals and a workforce that is stretched remains a critical challenge for managers going forward. The local authority has made significant additional investment to meet increasing demand. This includes an increase in social work posts, but some of these remain vacant.
137. An extensive range of training opportunities are available for all staff, including bespoke management training for team managers. However, the programme is

undermined by managers and social workers who advised inspectors that time to access training is compromised due to the heavy demands of case work.

138. The local authority has a standard for protecting the caseloads of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs), however during the period of inspection this was not always met. Managers recognise the need to enhance NQSWs' experiences in complex case work whilst balancing the need to ensure they learn at a pace that suits them. Newly qualified social workers were in general very complimentary about the support they received.
139. Managers and social workers are committed in their work. They express confidence in the senior management team and the steps being taken to re-organise and strengthen services including building capacity in teams, reinforcing management oversight and improving the routine use of performance data.

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 children in care 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 Swindon Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) is good.

Areas for improvement:

140. SSCB should ensure that information provided by agencies to enable the monitoring of performance contains sufficient qualitative information and analysis in order that the Board can build up a picture of effectiveness and quality of services for children, young people and their families
141. SSCB and relevant sub-groups must ensure that there is sufficient challenge to agencies where poor practice is identified. SSCB should seek assurances that there are action plans and timescales in place for improvement.
142. The Chair and Board should ensure that the SSCB annual report has a focus on the child's journey and experiences of safeguarding services.

Key strengths and weaknesses of the SSCB

143. The governance arrangements of the SSCB are effective and the Board complies with its statutory responsibilities. The Board is appropriately constituted and well attended by members including two lay members who independently challenge the work of the Board and its priorities for safeguarding children in Swindon. The SSCB is financially sound with members supporting the work of the Board proportionately. Further income is generated through training revenues.
144. The Board benefits from having a respected chair who also is a member of the Children's Trust and has built up effective working links with the Health and Well-being Board and the Adult Safeguarding Board. The chair has been able to influence the direction of work and priority setting, including the development of the 'early help record' to replace the CAF in Swindon.
145. The Board and chair demonstrate effective challenge to agencies. Examples of challenge include undertaking a test of assurance in relation to proposed senior management changes in Swindon and challenging health services on provision of suitable accommodation for young people with serious mental health issues. In both examples change occurred to support safeguarding practice, the former through a streamlining of the Director's roles and responsibilities. In the latter, a secure bed has been commissioned within a secure facility outside the Borough. This will curtail the unsuitable use of police custody for such vulnerable young people.
146. The Board has been restructured to improve members' interaction with each other and to allow at each Board meeting an opportunity for workshops

enabling members to have a very effective learning environment. The chair also ensures that he and sub-group chairs meet regularly to ensure that suitable progress is being made on working priorities.

147. The annual strategic business plan effectively identifies improvement priorities, including further development of assessment and practice in relation to domestic violence and child sexual exploitation (CSE). The business plan acknowledges a continued need to identify gaps in service and to manage these as a risk. This ensures challenge to agencies which continue to need to have a better understanding of the child's journey in order to improve practice. It appropriately identifies actions and timescales.
148. The SSCB undertakes a range of monitoring and bespoke audits, including deep dives on domestic violence and neglect and children subject to child protection plans for a second or subsequent time. Although there have been no recent serious case reviews in Swindon the SSCB has commissioned two local case reviews, including a SCIE review deep dive on neglect which resulted in comprehensive action plans and dissemination to a wide range of staff across agencies. Pocket guides to these issues have been developed and circulated to staff. Staff commented favourably on their usefulness and were familiar with the messages contained within them.
149. The SSCB is active in seeking to ensure that services providing support to adults over mental health and alcohol and drug dependency are aware of safeguarding issues, and contribute to the recognition of risk and its minimisation by attendance at the Board and involvement in key forums such as the multi-agency risk panel (MARP).
150. The Annual SSCB report is comprehensive in its coverage of SSCB and sub-group activity. However it is overly descriptive and does not offer sufficient analysis of performance or weaknesses, for example private fostering, LADO activity or CSE practice at the front-line. This inhibits sufficient challenge to practice or enabling a clear picture of the child's experiences of services.
151. The Board and the performance sub-group undertake regular monitoring of performance data. While there is some analysis of risk in relation to the effectiveness of work with young people there is an over reliance on data and targets and less focus on qualitative information from agencies, including social care, which means that the Board and members are less aware of and able to challenge day to day practice.
152. The SSCB undertakes case file audits and also commissioned a 'deep case dive' in October 2013 into the multi-agency responses to work to protect children living with domestic violence. The Board also audited six cases of children subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time, published in February 2014, with associated learning and action points captured in an overview report. Such activity yielded learning issues and action points. The domestic violence audit recognised the complexity of working with families in

this area and the need for staff to have time to work with such families. However, this work has not yet been translated into a dialogue with the local authority about high caseloads and social work capacity, thus reducing the impact of the audit.

153. The SSCB has highlighted issues around child sexual abuse and exploitation, including initiating an annual snapshot audit of children at risk. However, information produced from the audit and presented to the SSCB is data led and lacks analysis of the quality of work being undertaken with children and young people and whether the risk to them is being reduced as a result. Lack of information to the Board on practice in relation to CSE and other areas of work with young people means that the Board is not monitoring the effectiveness of local arrangements as well as it should. For example, the Board has not recognised that there are elements of poor performance in ensuring that all young people at risk in relation to CSE receive timely support and the right level of intervention to keep them safe.
154. The SSCB has been instrumental in ensuring that there is a range of policies and procedures in place and in raising awareness of key areas of concern and risk to young people. These include a multi-agency threshold for services document, work with the Children's Trust on the early help record as a replacement for the common assessment framework, and the development of the SSCB framework for neglect. The Board has also contributed well to the development of the multi-agency risk panel in relation to child sexual exploitation. Such work is very effectively supported by the recent commissioning of the 'Chelsea's choice' play for young people. The play examines issues of sexual exploitation and abusive relationships and has been performed to professional groups and young people in schools. The Board supported updates and revisions to the domestic violence strategy and needs assessment. A well-developed cyber-bullying strategy, including on-line safety modules, has been a further successful strand of work in keeping children and young people safer.
155. The LSCB provides a range of multi-agency training, including core areas such as child protection, domestic violence and CSE. Training is evaluated at delivery and longitudinally at four weeks after course attendance. Professional attendance is monitored and reported on. Evaluation returns indicate that the training is valued and the quality is felt by staff attending to be high. Such findings were reflected in conversations with practitioners during the period of inspection.

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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