

Bournemouth 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: 30 April 2014 – 21 May 2014

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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 and care 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.

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

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

The LSCB is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of good.

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. When children and young people are in need of early help they do not always receive a timely response.
2. Children and young people change social workers too often, so they and their families are unable to build trusting relationships with them. Plans to recruit more social workers are not sufficiently advanced.
3. Information from assessments is not always used well to make clear plans that reduce the risk to children and young people and improve their lives.
4. Managers' oversight of work and the challenge given by Independent Reviewing Officers is not sufficiently strong. As a result, in some cases, the progress made to improve children's lives is not fast enough.
5. The extent of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in the local authority area is not properly understood. Strategic planning processes and information sharing between partners is not sufficiently focused on protecting children from potential perpetrators.
6. Too many older children live more than 20 miles away from Bournemouth. As a result, it is more difficult for them to maintain their links with the area and to have regular contact with their social worker.
7. The local authority does not have high enough aspirations for its care leavers. The number who are actively involved in education, training and employment is too low and too few go to university.
8. Performance information is not used well enough to understand trends and respond quickly to changes.
9. Service managers have large and complex areas of responsibility. This means that they are unable to focus effectively on areas of work that most need their attention.
10. Some elected members do not have sufficient understanding of the work of children's social care. As a result, they do not offer sufficient challenge and scrutiny to the service to help improve its work.

The local authority has the following strengths

11. Elected members are committed to ensuring high quality services to children and young people in Bournemouth. They have increased the funding of front-line services at a time of budget pressures within the local authority.
12. The Family Solutions Team offers a good service to parents in need of early help services, helping them to develop skills to look after their children well.
13. When children are assessed as being at immediate risk of harm, effective action is taken through child protection enquiries.
14. Good arrangements are in place between the police and children's services to reduce risks to children when there are incidents of domestic abuse in families.
15. Direct work with children and families is well-established and helps to ensure that children's wishes and feelings are taken into account when decisions are being made about them.
16. Substantial improvements have been made to services for children who are privately fostered. As a result, significant progress has been made in ensuring the safety and well-being of some very vulnerable children and young people.
17. The Access to Resources team (ART) acts as an effective commissioning service. As a result, children and young people have timely access to services or placements that best meet their needs. The Virtual School is successful in helping looked after children up until the age of 16 to fulfil their educational potential.
18. When a decision is made that children need to find a new family through adoption, speedy and comprehensive family finding takes place to identify the best family to meet their needs. Children are prepared and supported very well to move to their new homes successfully.
19. Foster carers receive good support and training so that they undertake their role well. As a result, many children have stable placements with families who are able to meet their needs effectively.
20. Social workers recognise the individual needs of children and families and help them to participate in meetings and understand agreements made. Interpreters help those where English is not their first language and pictorial agreements are made with parents whose literacy is limited.

What does the local authority need to improve?

Areas for improvement

21. Ensure that all managers and workers are aware of the importance of understanding the indicators of CSE so that they can respond appropriately to reduce the risks to children and young people.
22. Improve the range and quality of data available at all levels of the local authority so that the work of children's social care can be properly monitored.
23. Accelerate the implementation of the recruitment and retention strategy so that the authority has a more stable and experienced workforce.
24. Improve the quality and consistency of management oversight of work so that social workers are clear about what they need to do to make sure that the lives of children and young people are improved.
25. Review the transfer protocols between teams within children's social care services so that caseloads are more equitable and children and young people have fewer changes of social worker.
26. Ensure that child protection conferences and review meetings focus more closely on reviewing the progress of plans made to support children and young people and how these improve their lives.
27. Review the provision and quality of services offered to older children who are at the edge of entering the care system so that, wherever possible, they remain in their own community.
28. Ensure that children and young people are given the appropriate help, proportionate to their age, to gain skills so that they can successfully live independently as adults.
29. Review the roles and responsibilities of service managers within the local authority so that there is sufficient capacity to respond to issues in times of absence.
30. Improve pathway planning for care leavers to consider all their needs and aspirations and to ensure that they receive the right help to achieve them.

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 the experiences of 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 (LSCB) was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the local safeguarding children board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of 5 of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, one seconded inspector and one contracted inspector.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Karen McKeown HMI

Team inspectors: Debora Barazetti-Scott HMI, Helen Cawston HMI, John Mitchell HMI, Kenneth Jones HMI, Andy Whippey (seconded Inspector) and Deane Jennings (contracted Inspector)

Information about this local authority area²

Children living in this area

- Approximately 32,800 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Bournemouth. This is 17.6% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 19.4% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 14.9% (the national average is 18.1%)
 - in secondary schools is 11.6% (the national average is 15.1%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 11.8% of all dependent children living in the area, compared with 21.6% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are mixed and Asian (Source: 2011 Census, ONS). However, a significant number of Europeans from the Accession Countries (particularly Poland) have moved to Bournemouth since these joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. 1,941 dependent children were classified as 'White Other' which includes those from the EU. This group is therefore larger than the Asian or Mixed ethnic categories. 2011 Census statistics on industry and ethnicity reveal that just over 20% of those classified as 'White Other' are working in accommodation and food service industries.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 14.9% (the national average is 18.1%)
 - in secondary schools is 11.6% (the national average is 13.6%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2014, 1,661 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 1,406 at 31 March 2013.
- At 31 March 2014, 236 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 215 at 31 March 2013.
- At 31 March 2014, 75 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from 52 at 31 March 2013.

² The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

Children who are looked after in this area

- Bournemouth is a small authority geographically. At the time of the inspection 289 children and young people were looked after by the local authority. A number of these looked after children and young people, although living outside the Bournemouth local authority area, still live within 20 miles of their biological parents' address in the neighbouring authorities of Poole and Dorset. Of the total:
 - 140 (50%) live outside the local authority area, 25% of these children live more than 20 miles away from their biological parents
 - 27 live in residential children's homes, of whom 59% live out of the authority area
 - 13 live in residential special schools, of whom 92% live out of the authority area and 54% live more than 20 miles away from their biological parents
 - 226 live with foster families, of whom 50% live out of the authority area and 19% live more than 20 miles away from their biological parents
 - 2 children live with parents
 - No children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - 22 children have been adopted
 - 5 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 120 children have ceased to be looked after, of whom 18% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 15 children and young people have ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - 7 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 operates one children's home. This home was judged to be good in its most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of Bournemouth's safeguarding arrangements was published in April 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Bournemouth's services for looked after children was in April 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of fostering was in October 2012 and the service was judged as good
- The previous inspection of adoption was in February 2012 and the service was judged as outstanding

- The previous inspection of private fostering was in December 2012 and judged to be inadequate

Other information about this area

- The Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services has been in post since August 2012 and previously was Director of Children's Services from January 2007.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since December 2013.
- Bournemouth Borough Council shares a joint LSCB with the Borough of Poole.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection require improvement to be good

31. Thresholds for services, the 'C' model, are known and understood across the partnership. The effective development of the Children First team as a single point of contact allows referrers to seek advice from qualified social workers and make referrals. Timely decisions about whether children meet the threshold for statutory help are made by qualified social workers and reviewed within 24 hours by their managers. However, signposting to the most appropriate early help services is less robust. Most decisions are appropriate to the needs of children, young people and their families. In a small number of cases seen by inspectors, historic information was not considered sufficiently, so families did not immediately receive the help that they needed. Information is obtained from other agencies in accordance with agreed protocols and consent to share information is sought from parents, although this is not always recorded.
32. Where children and families do not reach the threshold for the statutory services, early help services are available. A recent review of services through the Core Service Transformation Programme and the development of a clear Early Help Strategy are beginning to improve access to these services. An informative early help website for professionals provides an extensive range of information and advice to support them in their work with children and families. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well to assess the needs of families and ensure that they have the best support for their needs. The range of agencies acting as lead professionals in coordinating this support is increasing, particularly from those in education and health.
33. The location of the Family Solutions Team (FaST) within the early help offer means that parents and carers are able to gain support without needing a referral from another agency. As a result, they can attend a range of structured parenting programmes and have help from family support workers so that they can offer their children better care. For example, specialist parenting programmes are available for fathers and for the parents of teenagers. This support is high quality and parents who spoke to inspectors said that it helped them to be better parents.
34. The local authority's response to the Troubled Families initiative, Turnaround, has recently been integrated into the early help arrangements within Children's Services and is beginning to offer more effective targeted services to families on the edge of needing help from children's social care. While thresholds and responsibilities between the two services need further clarification, this service is beginning to show an impact on improving lives for these families.

35. When children are recognised as being at significant risk of harm, immediate action is taken. Timely strategy meetings with the police are convened by a social work manager who is based at the police station. Checks are made with other agencies so that decisions are made on the best information available. When children are assessed as being at immediate risk of harm, suitably qualified social workers take effective action through child protection enquiries.
36. The point at which cases transfer from the 'front door' services to other teams for assessment and intervention is not clear. Inspectors found significant differences in social worker caseloads. As a result, in some cases where children were in need of help there were delays in them being offered a service. High rates of sickness in the workforce and difficulties in recruiting social work staff also result in cases being covered by duty workers or allocated to managers who are undertaking direct work with families. This results in children and families having contact with a series of social workers in a short period. Parents and young people who spoke to inspectors said consistently that this affected their ability to work in partnership with children's social care to improve their lives.
37. The single multi-agency assessment has been implemented well as a way of assessing the needs of children and young people. Social workers gather good information about children and families and, as a result, assessments are rich in detail. Risk and protective factors are recorded well and, through effective direct work with children, their views are captured well in assessments. For some children and young people, particularly those with disabilities, their individual needs are properly recognised. However, assessments are not sufficiently analysed to understand the needs of the child or young person. As a result, plans do not clearly focus on what needs to be done to improve the life of the child or young person and how this work will be done.
38. Inspectors found the quality of management oversight and direction on cases inconsistent. This means that there is insufficient challenge and direction to social workers and this has led to drift and delay in some cases. Although social workers receive regular supervision, this is not sufficiently reflective to help them develop their skills so that they offer consistently good services to the children and families on their caseloads.
39. Throughout the work seen in Bournemouth, the best interests of children were at the forefront of work with families. Direct work with children and families is well-established and social workers use effective tools such as the 'All about me' booklet and the 'Three houses' model. These help to ensure that children's wishes and feelings are properly taken into account. Children are consistently seen and seen alone.
40. When domestic violence incidents occur, police systems to alert children's social care are timely and include sufficient information so that accurate and speedy decisions can be made. Referrals to the multi-agency risk assessment

conference (MARAC) are appropriate and well managed. In cases where children are at risk from dangerous offenders, the role of Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) is understood and inspectors saw good examples of the integration of MAPPA plans with child protection procedures.

41. Child protection conferences (CPCs) are well managed and provide sufficient opportunity for parents to contribute to discussions and to drawing up safety plans to protect their children. Other agencies who are involved with the family attend CPCs, including representatives from adult services. However, the engagement of housing is limited. Core groups take place regularly and effectively engage parents. However, there is not sufficient rigour in reviewing the progress of children on child protection plans by the chairs of CPCs to consider whether sufficient progress has been made and if alternative action is necessary.
42. Children and their families are well supported through a range of commissioned services that provide help and effective ways of working with some very complex problems. Programmes are available to help parents understand the impact of domestic violence on their children and for those with substance misuse problems. Specialist support is also available for families where children have been subject to sexual abuse. The Thames Valley Programme, for example, helps women who have been in relationships with perpetrators of sexual abuse to better protect their children.
43. The out of hours service provides emergency cover through having direct telephone access for all agencies and children and families. Referrals to the service are responded to well to ensure the immediate needs of children and their families are safeguarded.
44. Strategies to support children at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE) are underdeveloped. Policies and procedures are in place and evidence exists of some good working arrangements of the police with individual young people. However, in cases seen by inspectors, social workers and their managers concentrated too much on the immediate behaviour of individual young people rather than considering the factors that were leading to this. Protocols are in place with the police to monitor children who go missing. Return interviews take place but these are not used well enough to understand the reason why children go missing and to develop plans to avoid further episodes. An external organisation has been commissioned to offer an independent service, but this is not widely known about or used by social workers.
45. Education services hold a fortnightly multi-agency meeting about children causing concern. These effectively monitor the needs of vulnerable children and young people and provide support to help them receive the education that they need. Agencies work together effectively to share information to locate children who may be missing from education.

46. Private fostering arrangements have improved significantly since the inspection in December 2012, which judged services to be inadequate. The service works well, and in an innovative way, with the large number of English language schools in Bournemouth who provide education and arrange temporary homes for children from across the world while they are living in Bournemouth. As a result, there is an efficient and streamlined approach by the local authority to assessing host families and matching children with the right family who can meet their needs while living in Bournemouth. Managerial oversight of the service has been strengthened and a number of local events have been organised across the borough to raise awareness about private fostering arrangements. Assessments of carers are of a good quality and there is evidence of some effective work being undertaken by professionals to support some placements. While the number of local children who are known to be privately fostered is low, the service is working hard to raise awareness locally about private fostering arrangements.
47. Investigation of allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers is well-established and reviewed annually by the LSCB. Allegations are investigated by suitably qualified and experienced staff. Where allegations are substantiated, appropriate action is taken.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence require improvement to be good

48. Care is used effectively to safeguard children. Scrutiny of decisions to look after children has been strengthened through the establishment of an Edge of Care panel. Decisions are proportionate to the presenting issues and the interests of the children concerned and are informed by legal advice.
49. Children value the support they receive from their social workers and pathway workers. In cases seen by inspectors, professionals work hard to engage with children and young people and make sure that their best interests are considered. The availability of staff, quality of practice and management oversight are inconsistent, however, and too often children experience several changes of social worker. This makes it difficult for children to develop meaningful, trusting relationships with their social workers. As a result, some parents and children feel isolated from the service and are unclear about what is happening to help them.
50. For younger children, the Public Law Outline is used well to achieve permanence. Pre-proceedings agreements help parents understand what they are expected to do to improve conditions for their children. In some cases, family group conferences are used well to mobilise wider family support and consider alternative care arrangements within the family. The recent development of a specific foster placement for parents and babies is beginning to show some good outcomes. This was seen by inspectors to be used successfully in the context of care proceedings to prevent the need for premature separation of a young child from his mother. Where care

proceedings are necessary, reports meet court deadlines and effective liaison takes place with the children's guardian. Expert assessments are used only when necessary and, as a result, the time taken to conclude proceedings is decreasing and is now lower than in comparator local authorities.

51. Social workers and independent reviewing officers are not consistently focusing on achieving permanence for older children, of whom only a limited number have reunification plans. The range and choice of placements available within the borough has not kept pace with their needs, particularly as many have challenging behaviour. Effective commissioning arrangements with independent sector providers have helped to ensure that many of the children placed outside the borough are close enough to their homes and schools to minimise disruption to their lives. However, some children are placed at a considerable distance from their families and friends due to a lack of suitable local placements. While effective use is made of special guardianship arrangements, more needs to be done to secure long term stability for these older children and prepare them effectively for adulthood.
52. Figures provided for inspectors show a recent increase in the number of looked after children being able to live with family and friends carers, reducing unnecessary disruption to children's lives. Where this proactive approach is taken, children are able to return to parents, be cared for within their wider family networks or, where necessary, settle into permanent substitute families without unnecessary delay. However, the quality of practice for looked after children varies considerably. In half of a sample of cases reviewed by inspectors, planning lacked clarity of purpose, the authority was slow to determine the long-term plan for the child and momentum was lost. In these cases, efforts to promote change within families were unsuccessful and children were less likely to return home. These shortcomings meant that some children remained looked after for longer than necessary.
53. Children and young people access good advocacy and independent visitor support through a voluntary sector service commissioned by the local authority. However, not enough opportunities are taken to use advocacy to improve parents' engagement, particularly those who have specific needs to ensure that they understand why children's services are involved.
54. Young people who spoke to inspectors had limited awareness of their legal rights and entitlements. While the authority has a pledge for looked after children which sets out its commitments to them, children are not consistently being made aware and reminded of their entitlements, for example at their reviews. While the children in care council, 'CLICK', is regularly consulted and they seek other children's views through an annual survey, the local authority does not systematically monitor the extent to which other children participate in this survey.
55. Arrangements for safeguarding children who go missing from care are not sufficiently robust. Children's homes and foster carers are aware of the

procedures to follow when children go missing. Social workers prioritise seeing children when they return home. However, there is insufficient consideration given to the reasons why these young people were going missing and the risks to them when they were absent. Although training in the risks of CSE has been undertaken by professionals, they are not sufficiently alert to the dangers for these young people and concentrate too heavily on the immediate issues of their troublesome behaviour.

56. Nearly all looked after children benefit from up-to-date health assessments, although some of these do not have sufficient detail about their needs. While some examples were seen of good support from commissioned providers and effective coordination through use of a care programme approach, children's experience of mental health support is not consistently good. A lack of timely access to mental health treatment for children and a lack of focus on the impact of mental distress, particularly where children are placed far from home, were features impeding progress in nearly half of a sample of children's health care arrangements seen by inspectors. Whilst there is an emphasis on referrals and whether children are accessing a service, not enough consideration is given to whether children's wellbeing is actually improving as a result.
57. The virtual school supports children and young people well and aims to ensure they all attend good or better schools. Although only 72% were placed in such schools at the time of the inspection, careful monitoring of the progress by the virtual school indicates little difference between the progress made by those placed in good or better schools and others. The virtual school provides wide-ranging support that includes 1:1 home-based targeted tuition, nurture groups and literacy and numeracy intervention across all key stages, which helps those attending schools which are not yet good to achieve. Attendance of looked after children and young people is good both within and out of borough.
58. The attainment of looked after children at Key Stages 1 and 2 is in line with or better than the same group nationally. In 2013 at Key Stage 2, looked after children did well in maths. Although attainment in English the same year was lower than average, all looked after children made the expected two levels of progress in the subject. Attainment for looked after young people at Key Stage 4 was better than the average for the same group of young people nationally in 2014 and young people made expected or better progress.
59. Overall, looked after children are not achieving as well as children not looked after. However, the gap is beginning to narrow and targeted interventions and support provided by the virtual school is making a difference. Attainment for children and young people placed in schools outside the borough is lower than within borough.
60. All looked after children and young people have a personal education plan (PEP) and these are monitored well to ensure their changing needs are met.

The pupil premium is used properly to offer a range of additional support, including additional tuition, so that the children achieve their potential.

61. Monitoring and reporting the progress of looked after children by the virtual school lacks detail. In particular, the annual report does not include any comparative analysis of children placed within and outside the borough and whether gaps are closing, or how well those with additional learning needs attain and progress. This lack of detail makes it harder for elected members and senior managers as corporate parents of looked after children to hold the service to account.
62. Children are generally positive about the support they receive for their education through their carers, their social workers and the virtual school. However, virtual school support currently comes to an end at sixteen. Young people experience a loss of support from social workers at eighteen and few have taken up the option through the Staying Put scheme to remain living with their foster carers after eighteen. As a result of this reduction in support, too many young people struggle to live independently, and disengage from education and training by the time they reach adulthood; very few go through to university. Managers recognise the need to improve this situation.
63. Family contact is well managed and inspectors could see social workers and pathway workers working hard to maintain family contact even where young people had to be placed at a distance from home. The supervised contact service delivered through the family centre works well and the records provided by contact workers make useful contributions to assessments for children subject to care proceedings or child protection plans.
64. Foster carer checks, assessment and supervision are robust. Foster carers consulted by inspectors reported that they were being well supported by the local authority. Social workers responsible for children and those responsible for foster carers work together closely, with communication between the teams enhanced by them being located in the same office. These strengths help to ensure that foster carers provide good care for children and that children experience fewer changes of placement and stay longer than the statistical neighbours' and the national averages.
65. Corporate parenting panel members recognise that the authority has not yet ensured sufficiency of local placements for all young people who need them. While more children have been enabled to remain within their wider family and friends networks, in-house placements for those who require non-relative foster care fell from 76 in February 2012 to 67 in March 2014. This was at a time when the number of children looked after by the local authority was increasing significantly. As a result, the authority relies increasingly on independent fostering agency carers, the number of children placed with them having increased over this period from 79 to 106. Recent recruitment activity has stemmed the loss of in-house carers, with numbers now starting to rise towards levels seen two years ago. However, managers acknowledge a

continuing gap in local provision for children with more complex needs who require family-based care. A scheme to recruit specific carers for these young people has started, although no additional carers were in place at the time of the inspection.

66. Where children and young people are not placed in local authority accommodation, the authority has a principle of placing children in good or better provision. Where inspection outcomes of an individual home reduce the judgement, there is a clear process for evaluating how the needs of children are still met through challenge meetings with the provider led by the Access to Resources team. Where children are placed outside the local authority, social workers and their managers work hard to keep contact with them and ensure that they have access to appropriate education and health provision.
67. The local authority recognises the importance of the independent reviewing officer function and has increased capacity in response to the increase in children being looked after. As a result, nearly all children's statutory reviews are held on time and most children attend them. This enables independent reviewing officers to keep an overview of children's progress. However, their efforts to challenge inadequate planning and drive plans forward for children where there is delay in achieving permanence are hindered by a weak, ad-hoc system of alerts. This means that themes and lessons are not drawn out, reported and dealt with in a systematic way. The authority has not yet produced a 2013–14 independent reviewing officer service annual report, hence there is no up-to-date overview of the contribution the service is making to children's lives.
68. Case records and chronologies are generally well maintained and up to date, and in most cases seen during the inspection they provide clear information to help explain young people's histories and experiences.
69. Practice is sensitive to the diverse needs and circumstances of children, young people and their parents. For example, family assessment practitioners have experience in working with adults with learning disabilities and they make good use of simplified pictorial agreements to help parents with limited literacy understand what is expected of them. Social workers and other staff have good access to interpreting services contracted by the Access to Resources Team, enabling them to work more effectively with families.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is good

70. The leadership and management of the adoption service is strong and stable with a good understanding of national policy developments and their impact on the local service. The local authority has sustained strong performance against the adoption scorecard for 2010–2013 with significantly better performance than statistical neighbours and the England average.

71. Most children are placed with adoptive parents within a timescale that meets their best interests. However, there are a number of children for whom timely plans for permanence are being delayed through legal challenges to their placement order. In the majority of these cases, children have already been matched with prospective adoptive carers. A small number of children with complex needs have had a placement order for a long time while the local authority has made concerted efforts to find the right carers for them.
72. However, for some children the decision to seek permanence through adoption has not been taken at an earlier enough stage, with social workers having an over-optimistic view of the ability of families to change and meet the needs of the child. Where this is the case, parallel planning for adoption has not been timely and this has resulted in delays for a small number of children in being placed with a permanent family.
73. When adoption is being considered prior to an agency decision, all children are allocated a family finder from the adoption team. This results in effective planning and consultation with the child's social worker. A family support practitioner from the adoption service begins work at this point to ensure that life story information is collected, collated and the story produced in time for the child's move to their new family. Examples of life story work and materials seen by inspectors were of a very good quality, and examples were seen of imaginative work to help children move successfully to an adoptive placement.
74. Family finding is good and focuses well on making sure that children are found the best family to meet their needs as soon as possible. The use of national systems and collaboration with voluntary adoption agencies and other authorities as part of a regional consortium is comprehensive. As a result, in the last year approximately a third of children have been found adoptive families approved by other authorities.
75. Children's case files detail clear chronologies of all family finding activity and significant efforts are made to identify potential adoptive placements using a good range of options, including targeted recruitment for children who have specific needs. The local authority has participated in an adoption 'activity' day organised in conjunction with neighbouring authorities. This was successful in finding adoptive families for two children and another day is planned to take place very shortly.
76. The local authority has responded well to the challenge of increasing adopters through a strong focus on marketing and recruitment. The number of enquiries increased by more than a third over the past year, resulting in 25 families being approved, which is a 50% increase on the previous year. Information evenings are held as frequently as every fortnight. Prospective adopters who spoke to inspectors were positive about the response of the team to their initial enquiries and valued the content of such evenings. Some potential adopters chose the local authority as a result of 'word of mouth' recommendations from other adopters.

77. Significant efforts have successfully been made to increase the skill base of the adoption team and the children's social work teams to facilitate direct work with children and families once placements have been made. For example, the use of 'Theraplay' helps families during the early days of placement and assists in the prevention of family breakdown. Training has been undertaken with foster carers to help them support children in a successful transition to an adoptive placement. Although there have been two adoption disruptions in 2013, these are the first since 2011. To ensure that the learning from these instances was understood, a training event involving panel members, adoption and children's social workers has been held to improve practice.
78. Most prospective adopter assessments are completed within six months. In the few where there have been delays, these have been very short and have not affected the progress of the application. With the introduction of the two stage assessment and approval process, panel dates are secured early in the process to ensure a timely completion for the approval of prospective adopters. The local authority is beginning to implement a 'foster to adopt' scheme but this is not yet embedded and there is currently no published policy in place. Potential adopters have said that they would consider this option, which would reduce the number of changes a child has to make before being adopted. However, there has only been one Bournemouth child placed on this basis to date. Adopter records are well organised and detailed. Good examples of clear information leaflets were seen detailing information for prospective adopters, birth families and children.
79. The Adoption Panel is well chaired with good quality reports produced for panel. Prospective adopters reports are thorough and children's permanence reports are detailed. Training developed by the Adoption Service and involving the panel chair has had a positive impact in terms of improving the quality of reports. Panel activity has been high in the year 2013–2014 with 36 matches of children and 25 prospective adopter approvals. Approvals include carers from an increasingly wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. An observation of panel by inspectors saw prospective adopters able to participate effectively. Panel minutes are of good quality with a clear rationale for decisions taken. There is a robust process to ensure that agency decision making is timely.
80. The local authority has well developed systems of adoption support with high quality adoption support plans. Adopters who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the level of support the service provided. There is a good range of adoption support services including training, support groups and social events as well as more individual support such as adoption allowances and therapeutic support, including work with a designated psychologist. The responsibility for children placed by other authorities is understood well and the adoption service is currently providing post-adoption support to 11 children who now live in Bournemouth.

The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers is: requires improvement to be good

81. The care leavers service works to support the basic needs of young people in terms of health, accommodation, education and training. However, insufficient emphasis is placed on raising their aspirations and, as recognised by the local authority, developing their emotional well-being and resilience in preparation for living independently.
82. Through CLICK, the authority has engaged well with a representative group of care leavers, by listening to and acting on their views, for example in clarifying the roles of pathway workers, ensuring they are more accessible and ensuring care leavers are better prepared for independence. Although the overall number of young people participating in consultation is low, those that do are supported well by the participation worker and gain much from the experience. The group has developed a care leavers' charter, Stepping Stones, which is now helping care leavers to understand their entitlement and also helps to inform pathway planning. The impact of the charter on outcomes for care leavers has not yet been evaluated.
83. The range of accommodation available to care leavers has improved. The proportion of young people in suitable accommodation last year was 93% and is in line with the national and similar area averages. The local authority acts as guarantor when necessary to help young people secure private tenancies and young people can bid for council accommodation. Very few young people take advantage of the authority's option for them to stay with their foster carers after the age of 18 to provide themselves more time to prepare for independence. Only two were doing so at the time of the inspection. There is no clear policy to inform young people and encourage them to take advantage of the Staying Put option.
84. Care leavers are still placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for short periods in emergencies and five were living in this type of accommodation at the time of the inspection. Although these placements are supported by a risk assessment and action plans and additional support to keep them safe and progress to more suitable accommodation, the risk assessments do not record potential risks to young people from others occupying the premises.
85. As identified by the local authority, young people are not always sufficiently well prepared for living independently. Many have difficulties managing their finances and lack the emotional readiness and resilience to live independently. A training flat and facilities to assess and develop their skills has been established and there is more emphasis on children's homes and foster carers developing these skills. Young people appreciate the developments and find them useful, although only a minority of care leavers have benefited so far.
86. The basic health needs of care leavers are addressed but the authority has only recently developed and started providing care leavers with health

passports. The extent to which young people engage with mental health and addiction services is variable and there is no clear health pathway for care leavers to ensure health concerns are addressed in a timely manner to prevent problems escalating.

87. The quality of pathway planning to address the needs of young people is variable. More recently prepared pathway plans are detailed, with clearer actions and outcomes to address young people's needs. Pathway plans record referrals to health services but there is often insufficient input from health professionals. Where detailed attention is paid to these aspects, it is often following crises. Plans are not sufficiently explicit about the preparedness of young people for living independently and some plans are not sufficiently ambitious for young people, recording the status quo rather than supporting improvement.
88. The local authority makes good efforts to keep in contact with care leavers and, at the time of the inspection, only three young people were not in contact with the care leavers' service. However, the overall level of support young people receive reduces at the age of 18 –a time of significant change in their lives. This affects their ability to deal with the complexities in their lives that they might experience. The local authority is aware of this and has commissioned an independent review of services, but work to improve this has been too slow.
89. Although most care leavers engage well with their pathway workers, caseloads of up to 30 care leavers mean that levels of contact can be limited and are not always appropriate to their needs. Young people who met inspectors said they found their pathway workers difficult to contact at times and they did not always receive a response, even in times of crisis. However, inspectors saw some good examples of pathway workers supporting young people with financial and housing concerns and the complexities of living independently.
90. Almost all young people now progress to education or training at the end of KS4 but participation declines steadily after this age. By the age of 19, 40% of care leavers are not in education, training or employment. Support and intervention provided by the virtual school pre-16 is not replicated post-16 and there is significantly less focus on helping older young people achieve. The local authority is, however, increasingly helping young people to secure apprenticeships and provides apprenticeships in a number of vocational areas along with work experience opportunities. Seven young people were undertaking apprenticeships at the time of the inspection. Likewise, the authority is placing more emphasis on raising young people's aspirations and on encouraging them to progress to higher education, but only two young people were at university. Young people who spoke to inspectors were not clear about what support would be available to them if they wished to apply for university.

Leadership, management and governance requires improvement to be good

91. Elected members are committed to offering high quality services to vulnerable children and their families. The lead member takes her role as champion of children's services in the authority very seriously and has been successful in supporting additional funding against the base budget to meet the increased demand for the service. A clear scheme of delegation is in place for officers.
92. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) also acts as Director of Adult's Services but this does not affect her ability to fully undertake her role and commitment to ensuring the best outcomes for children. This has recently been confirmed through an independently commissioned test of assurance of her role. The DCS is an active member of the LSCB and, with her senior management team, works effectively with partners and other local authorities to establish responsive and sustainable children's services.
93. The Chief Executive takes a keen interest in the progress of children and young people in the borough and meets regularly with the DCS to ensure that he understands the service. He is personally involved with a number of care leavers in supporting their career ambitions through the 'opening doors' process, which helps to find appropriate work experience and placements for young people with specific career ambitions.
94. Clear local priorities are set out in the Children and Young People's Plan 2013–2014 and delivery on the four key priorities is overseen by the Children's Trust Programme Board. The Children's Trust and the Health and Wellbeing Board understand the needs of the local community and joint commissioning arrangements are in place. Roles and lines of accountability are clear. A dedicated lead commissioner for children's services effectively oversees the strategic planning for services to meet the needs of children in Bournemouth, including those jointly commissioned with other authorities; for example, the CAMHS services is commissioned on a pan-Dorset basis. There is a recognition that waiting times for treatment in mental health services for vulnerable children and care leavers are too long. The impact is not currently being measured but options to improve treatment timescales and ensure reporting of outcomes are being considered.
95. At an operational level, the Access to Resources Team acts as an effective broker of commissioned services across the whole of children's services. They ensure that children, young people and their families receive the most appropriate service to meet their needs and that resources are used effectively.
96. The strategic plans of the local authority properly focus on the needs of children who are vulnerable and looked after. The local authority has a good knowledge of what needs to be focused on to improve its services. The commissioning and sufficiency statement recognises that an increase in

placement choice and availability is needed for specific groups of children who are placed away from Bournemouth, but do not necessarily need specialist provision. There has been a concerted effort to recruit more carers to meet this requirement. There is also a recognition that more accommodation options are needed for children in care and care leavers aged 16+. As yet this is still under review.

97. A needs analysis within Bournemouth has recently been undertaken to understand how many children and young people are affected by parents or carers with domestic abuse, substance use issues, and/or mental ill-health. A mapping exercise of existing services has been undertaken, but this is still in draft form. Parental mental health data is limited as there is no expectation that adult mental health services collect information about children in the household.
98. Data systems are not sufficiently rigorous, making it difficult for managers at all levels to accurately monitor performance on key aspects of service delivery and trends such as quality and timeliness of care planning for looked after children, or how the diverse ethnic and cultural needs of children are met. The electronic recording system does not facilitate effective management oversight at all levels. First line managers do not readily have access to performance data which identifies trends by team. This means that individual managers have set up local systems to interrogate data relevant to their service, which is time consuming and does not facilitate good information sharing and learning across services and agencies.
99. The reconfiguration of services in November 2013 sought to align teams to be responsive to the needs of service users at different ages and stages of their lives. This is still bedding in and a combination of inconsistency in practice at team manager level, lack of clarity about transfer points between teams, some vacancies and sickness absences are putting pressure on some teams, resulting in an inconsistent service for children and young people.
100. The revised workforce development strategy demands better standards of practice and robust management of staff performance. This has contributed to the pressure on service managers who have been charged with managing the impact of this extensive change as well as running their specific areas of service delivery. The span of control of senior managers means that some hold large and complex portfolios of responsibilities, and there are limited contingency arrangements in place to cover this work in times of absence.
101. The current recruitment strategy is acknowledged by the local authority to be ineffective in meeting the need for a stable, sustainable workforce, and the external strategic review has been commissioned to consider how the recruitment and retention activity could be improved.
102. The recent appointment of a Principal Social Worker is a clear recognition and commitment by the authority that this is key in leading the development of the

workforce to drive up practice standards through clear expectations and the provision of increased professional development opportunities. Although social workers and managers who spoke to inspectors said that they were encouraged and supported to take relevant training, they felt that their workloads were too high for them to attend. As a result, the take-up rate for local authority based training is low, with just over four days per year for children's social care staff in 2013–14, and very low take up in some key areas of work. For example, just six people from children's social care services undertook training on CSE.

103. Bournemouth learns from inspection, reviews and internal audits. Independently commissioned research about the effectiveness of child protection procedures and services to care leavers has alerted the authority to the need to improve current practice. 'The Heart of the Work', commissioned by the LSCB, is planned to shape the way that child protection work takes place. A rolling programme of multi-agency quality assurance audits is in place to understand the strengths and weaknesses of services. Managers at all levels are involved in this process. There are some good illustrations of how learning through audit has improved outcomes for children. For example, in response to a gap identified through auditing activity the local authority has increased awareness of options which enable looked after children to live with family and friends. This has resulted in the number of looked after children placed with family and friends increasing significantly in the last 12 months (from 9 to 41 in the 12 months preceding the inspection). In most family and friends cases sampled by inspectors, children were progressing well.
104. The member-led corporate parenting panel takes a clear interest in the progress of looked after children and care leavers and celebrates their successes. However, the scrutiny of services by elected members is not sufficiently challenging or rigorous. For example, the panel has not analysed the reasons for the increase in the number of children who are looked after and is therefore unable to challenge officers about the needs of this vulnerable group of young people. In discussions with inspectors, the children's overview and scrutiny committee showed commitment to ensuring the needs of vulnerable children are met. However, the committee does not offer sufficient scrutiny of social care performance measures or use its function to call in key data. This means that their challenge function in improving services and holding officers to account is limited.
105. There is some effective participation activity, particularly with children in care (CLICK), and although there is only a small group who meet regularly, wider consultation is achieved. They have been involved in developing the pledge for looked after children. At present there is no formal audit as to how well the 'promise' is kept. Young people are regularly consulted by officers about key issues, such as the recent work on refocussing the youth service. However, young people told inspectors that they are not always clear how issues which concern them are addressed, and some state that they do not always find out the outcomes of their contributions.

What the inspection judgements mean: the local authority

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

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

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

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

Section 2: The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

The effectiveness of the LSCB requires improvement to be good

Areas for improvement

106. Ensure that there is a strategic understanding of the extent of child sexual exploitation in the area so that the partnership can be assured that children are protected from potential perpetrators.
107. Review the data available to the LSCB to ensure that it properly reflects the specific safeguarding needs of the area. This should include information about how children are safeguarded in families where there are substance misuse, mental health or disabilities issues.
108. Review reporting arrangements between the LSCB and Dorset Family Justice Board, local community safety partnership, and the Dorset MAPPA Strategic Management Board to ensure that safeguarding of these vulnerable groups of children is properly considered.
109. Develop mechanisms for the evaluation of the impact of training on practice to ensure that the Board knows that it has a suitably trained workforce across the partnership.
110. Ensure that frontline staff are well informed about the lessons learnt from serious case reviews and that these are used to improve their practice.
111. Review the contribution of housing in Bournemouth to the strategic oversight of safeguarding children in the area.

Key strengths and weaknesses of the LSCB

112. Bournemouth Borough Council has a joint local safeguarding children board with the Borough of Poole. These arrangements are effective as many partner agencies have responsibilities across both authorities. As a result, joint policies and procedures and thresholds for services are consistent and this avoids unnecessary duplication. The funding of the board is sound and supported by agreed funding from partners. While almost all key partners are actively involved in the work of the board, there is no strategic representation from housing in Bournemouth. As a result, there is no opportunity to challenge the contribution of housing providers to ensure that children are kept safe.
113. As a joint board, it is able to share resources, learning and good practice and it enables challenge between the local authorities. Trends in performance of children social care services are routinely considered. However, in some important areas there has been insufficient consideration of the differing practices between the two authorities. For example, in 'The heart of the work,'

a recently commissioned piece of research considering the quality of child protection practice in the area, the evaluation did not consider these differences. As a result, it is not clear that the planned changes in the child protection systems in Bournemouth are directly linked to local findings.

114. In some key areas, the Board has strong working relationships. For example, the Board shares an integrated work plan on early help with Bournemouth Children Trust Board. Reporting arrangements between the Board, the Children's Trust Board and the Bournemouth and Poole Health and Wellbeing Board ensure that safeguarding has a clear focus in their work. The Board is aware of the need to ensure better links with adult services. Effective work with the Pan-Dorset Domestic Violence Strategic Board ensures a joined up approach between adult and children's services in Bournemouth. More work is required for the Board to know that children are routinely safeguarded in families where there are substance misuse, mental health or disabilities issues.
115. Links with the local Family Justice Board, the strategic management board for the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and the local community safety partnership are not sufficiently well developed. This means that the Board does not have a sufficient oversight of the safeguarding needs of children who are involved in anti-social behaviour, those in private and public law proceedings or at risk from adults who pose a significant risk to the community.
116. The Board has access to a range of performance data but this is not comprehensive and, in some areas, not properly analysed to understand trends in the area. For example, although the Board collects data about children who are missing, this is not used effectively. The Board does not currently receive reports about the needs of looked after children who are placed out of the area. The new Chair of the Board recognises this and has begun to improve the use of information to promote improvement.
117. The annual report does not meet statutory requirements. It does not provide an effective evaluation of safeguarding in the area by drawing on intelligence, scrutiny, data and learning from audit and serious case reviews. This means that the report does not provide the Chief Executive of Bournemouth Borough Council and the most senior representatives of other partners with strong and clear messages about where key improvements need to be made.
118. Whilst the Board has a clear set of priorities, these have been driven by statutory guidance and national priorities rather than a strategic assessment of needs of the local population. For example, the Board has clear procedures in place to protect children at risk of CSE and has worked to raise the profile in the community and train staff to recognise signs of CSE. However, there is insufficient strategic understanding of local patterns and trends. As a result, Board partners are not able to intervene in a targeted and strategic way to prevent and disrupt child sexual exploitation. An audit of the impact and

quality of case work is currently being undertaken, the outcome of which is not yet available.

119. A Pan-Dorset learning and improvement framework is in place. Serious Case Reviews and other learning reviews are undertaken by a local sub-group. They track the implementation of learning closely through action plans and audit and feed them into the training programme and through bespoke briefings. However, frontline staff were not knowledgeable about the learning from Bournemouth's last Serious Case Review and more needs to be done to ensure that social workers understand the local learning. There are currently no serious case reviews underway within the area.
120. The Pan-Dorset Child Death Overview Panel reviews all deaths of children in Bournemouth and reviews learning and trends from across Dorset. Themes from the data are identified and translated into targeted media campaigns to reduce risk to children. These include the 'drinking heads' and safe sleeping campaigns in 2013, which promoted responsible parental alcohol use and raised awareness of the risks of co-sleeping with babies.
121. Political oversight of safeguarding in Bournemouth is good. The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services sits as an observer on the Board and uses her role effectively as Deputy Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Children's Trust Board. She ensures that the safeguarding of children is a priority in Bournemouth by reporting the impact of the work of the Board within the local authority and making appropriate links with corporate planning processes. A lay member strengthens links with the community and plays an active role on the Board.
122. The LSCB recognises its role in monitoring the improvements in safeguarding services within the partnership. Following an inspection judgement of inadequate on private fostering in Bournemouth in 2012, the Board now receives regular reports about the service so that they can be assured of progress.
123. Engagement with schools is good. A recent campaign by the Board to improve e-safety has resulted in almost all schools in Bournemouth having an e-safety champion who is supported with self-evaluation tool kits, audits and regular training from the Board.

What the inspection judgements 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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