

Trafford Metropolitan 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: 27 January 2015 – 18 February 2015

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The overall judgement is that children’s services are good

The local authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for good.

It is Ofsted’s expectation that, as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.²

The judgements on areas of the service that contribute to overall effectiveness are:

1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
3. Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding

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.

² A full description of what the inspection judgements mean can be found at the end of this report.

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The local authority

Summary of findings

Children's services in Trafford are good because:

Leadership, management and governance

- Outcomes for children are at least good, and are outstanding for care leavers. Children and young people express a high level of satisfaction with the help and support they receive and they are encouraged to do well. There is a strong commitment to promoting the voice of the child, which is helping to influence the shape of services which are consistently good.
- Ambition and prioritisation of services for vulnerable children and their families is given the highest importance. There are many examples of innovation, hard work and determination demonstrated by elected members, officers and workers at all levels to ensure that vulnerable children and families get the best possible service.
- Managers are proactive and when areas for development are identified, take robust action to secure improvement. The local authority is striving for excellence and continuous improvement, delivered through well-planned change programmes.

Partnership working

- Thresholds for access to service are clear, understood and applied consistently, so children and young people get the right level of service in a timely way. Partnership work is highly effective, underpinned by a fully integrated service delivery model, so families receive a holistic response to meet their needs.
- There is a wide range of integrated early help services which are sharply focused on meeting the needs of children and families early, characterised by the effective work with those engaged with the Troubled Families programme and those children on the edge of care.
- Schools make a strong contribution to safeguarding children and they have high aspirations for looked after children. There is good use of the pupil premium, underpinned by access to good quality education which is closing the attainment gap for this vulnerable group of children.

Quality of practice

- Children in need (CiN) are effectively prioritised, needs are met early, and risks reduced safely, so they do not enter the child protection system unnecessarily.
- The quality of social work practice is good. Social workers know children well and the voice of the child is highly valued, leading to assessments that are generally good and planned interventions that make a discernible difference.

What does the local authority need to improve?

There are no priority or immediate actions.

Areas for improvement

Permanence planning for children

1. Ensure delay is eliminated for prospective adopters at stages one and two of the recruitment process.

Assessment, planning and participation

2. Ensure that plans always include clear and measurable objectives and timescales to inform the work of core groups, so that progress can be closely monitored and evaluated.
3. Ensure that children who are subject to the child protection process have access to a suitable independent advocate if they want one, to help them make their views known and understood to inform decisions about their life.
4. Improve the timeliness of the initial response to complaints about children's services so that issues are resolved for children and families at an early stage and cases do not escalate unnecessarily to stages one and two of the formal process.
5. Ensure that full consideration is given to all aspects of equality and diversity as part of the assessment and planning process so that the individual needs of children are met comprehensively.
6. Ensure that all looked after children who can benefit from an independent visitor have access to this provision so that there is a special adult who sees them routinely to support their development.

The local authority's strengths

7. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the multi-agency leadership team have implemented a highly effective programme of change, including a formalised Section 75 Agreement (NHS Act 2006) under which pooled budget arrangements have maximised the use of available resources. This underpins the delivery of a fully integrated, high quality, multi-agency service for children and families.
8. Workforce planning is strong. Leaders and managers have effectively created an extremely stable and positive environment for social work to flourish. Recruitment of experienced, well-trained social workers is successful and highly competitive, and retention rates are very good.

9. The local authority is an outward facing organisation that has a very good track record of making the best use of learning drawn from a range of activities, such as peer reviews, which has helped to sustain good quality service delivery over time and to drive improvement in known areas for development.
10. Managers know the service very well. They are supported by excellent performance management and quality assurance systems and a wide range of routine and bespoke audit activity that is closely scrutinised, leading to good action planning. There is a strong culture of well-planned, incremental change which builds on success.
11. There are many opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the design of services, and the political and strategic leadership of the local authority is committed to these principles; children's views are listened to, taken seriously and acted on.
12. The proportion of children in good or better schools is high. Schools' performance across a broad education agenda is building resilience, supporting academic success and making a strong contribution to children's ability to safeguard themselves.
13. Services for children in need (CiN) are given high priority, and the effective and exemplary use of a specialist independent reviewing officer (IRO) to oversee and chair reviews of these cases is making a significant difference to improving outcomes for children.
14. Priority is given to the completion of social work assessments, so that need is assessed early to inform decisions. Swift action is taken to protect children through the child protection system and to support children and families who need a service but do not meet the threshold for access to statutory services.
15. Young people at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) are effectively prioritised and they receive outstanding support, which is delivered with great sensitivity and persistence by youth workers. Inspectors spoke with a number of young people who are at risk because of missing episodes or exposure to possible or actual sexual exploitation. They all said that their lives would have been much worse without this support and that it has helped them to protect themselves from serious harm.
16. Sufficiency and quality of placements for children, including care leavers, is supporting effective work with children and young people. The vast majority of looked after children live in close proximity to Trafford, where they receive all the support they need so that they enjoy stability as they grow-up.
17. The quality of service provision and direct work with care leavers is exemplary, so their needs are comprehensively met and they feel well prepared for adulthood.

Progress since the last inspection

18. The last Ofsted inspection of Trafford's safeguarding arrangements was in May 2010. The local authority was judged to be good. The last Ofsted inspection of Trafford's services for looked after children was in May 2010. The local authority was judged to be good.
19. The last inspection of the adoption service was in March 2011 and judged local authority provision as good. The last inspection of the fostering services was in June 2011 and judged local authority provision as good.
20. The local authority's track record and capacity to improve is very good. All the recommendations from the previous inspections have been addressed to ensure that improvement is made and good performance is sustained across all the key judgement areas. Services are making a demonstrable difference to improve the lives of children and families, for example the outstanding provision made for care leavers.
21. Political and strategic leaders of the local authority and senior managers in the children's social care service provide outstanding leadership. Leaders and managers are ambitious and they are relentlessly focused on improving outcomes and strive for excellence, so that children get the best possible service.
22. The success of the local authority is characterised by the highly effective partnership work and in particular the joint working arrangements between the local authority and the health service provider. This is underpinned by a fully integrated children's social care and health service; a delivery model which provides a highly effective response for children and families.

Summary for children and young people

- Social workers are committed and work hard to meet the needs of children and families. Children told inspectors that they are highly satisfied with the level of help they receive and that their workers want them to do their very best.
- Councillors and the managers give the highest priority to providing support for vulnerable children and their families and this has ensured that children and families consistently get a good service.
- Children's needs are assessed by workers who listen to them and know them well and there are many opportunities for children and young people to have their say about the service they receive, which is leading to continual improvement. However, not many children are using the independent advocate service to help them get their views across at important meetings.
- There is a wide range of early help services which are helping children and young people, including the excellent support provided by youth workers. Youth workers work really well with young people who go missing or are at risk of sexual exploitation and this helps to safely reduce risk for these children and young people.
- When there are safeguarding concerns about children or young people these are managed quickly and effectively to ensure that children are protected, or they are given advice and guidance on where to get the help they need.
- Children who are in the care of the local authority live in good homes close to Trafford so they can stay in the same school and have good contact with friends and family.
- Children and young people experience good arrangements to support their health and well-being and they attend good schools. They achieve better results than children in the care of other local authorities and the attainment gap is closing between them and other children living in Trafford.
- Everybody wants the best for all children and young people in their care and their successes are celebrated.
- Young people who are in Trafford's care do very well. They live in homes where they feel safe, with the support they need. A high proportion of young people are in employment, education or training and they receive the help they need so that they are equipped for independence as they progress to adulthood.

Information about this local authority area³

Children living in this area

- Approximately 52,728 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Trafford. This is 23% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 15% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 12% (the national average is 17%)
 - in secondary schools is 10% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 22% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British and Mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 16% (the national average is 19%)
 - in secondary schools is 9% (the national average is 14%).
- Trafford is a comparatively affluent Borough, but with distinct areas of relative deprivation.

Child protection in this area

- At 31st December 2014, 1,346 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a small reduction from 1,398 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31st December 2014, 258 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 283 at 31 March 2014.
- At 28th January 2015, less than five children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from six at 31 March 2014.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31st December 2014, 338 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 63.8 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 315 (60 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2014. Of this number:
 - 93 (or 27%) live outside the local authority area

³ 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.

- 15 live in residential children’s homes, of whom 20% live out of the authority area
 - 9 live in residential special schools⁴, of whom 100% live out of the authority area
 - 233 live with foster families, of whom 26.2% live out of the authority area
 - 46 live with parents, of whom 21.7% live out of the authority area
 - no children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
- there have been 16 adoptions (January-December 2014)
 - 2 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 112 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 4.5% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 30 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates three children’s homes. One is judged to require improvement and two are judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since July 2010.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since January 2010.

⁴ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children, young people and families benefit from a wide range of good quality, well-coordinated services at all levels of need. Services are readily accessible and have a demonstrable impact, leading to improved outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>There is widespread understanding among professionals of the thresholds for access to social care intervention. The multi-agency referral and assessment team (MARAT) brings together professionals from different agencies in one place and ensures that information is shared promptly and the right response is provided. Decisions taken about how and when to intervene in children’s lives are timely and appropriate. Swift, decisive action is taken to ensure that children at risk of significant harm are effectively safeguarded.</p> <p>Completion of assessments is timely and they make good use of relevant historical factors in a child’s life in evaluating risk and need and identifying how to provide help. They are appropriately focused on process but there is little use of research recorded by social workers to support their decisions and there is insufficient consideration of the impact of equality and diversity. Plans do not consistently focus on what progress needs to be made by when.</p> <p>The voice of the child is heard and evident in assessments, and is helping to shape effective plans and direct work with children and families. However, children do not have routine access to an independent advocate to support them through the child protection process.</p> <p>Management oversight of work with children and families is good. There are effective systems in place to ensure that actions and decisions are reviewed and, where necessary, challenged. Plans drawn up for children are outcome-focused and regularly reviewed. The use of a dedicated reviewing officer to oversee work with CiN is highly effective.</p> <p>Social workers know the children they work with well and provide good support to meet their needs and help them stay safe. Children and young people at risk of harm through going missing or CSE have access to very good support from youth workers. The Children with Additional Needs team (CANs) provides children, young people and their families with good support at the right level.</p>	

23. Children in Trafford benefit from a well-coordinated and wide range of services that provides help at an early stage. These services are underpinned by a coherent multi-agency strategy and this is making a significant difference in improving the lives of children and families.
24. A very large proportion (82%) of Trafford's under-fives are registered with children's centres. There has been a significant increase in health visitor capacity, supporting the delivery of intensive support to 98% of Trafford's children in their first year of life through the Trafford pathway. There is a structured approach to the provision by specialist health services of targeted support for hard-to-reach families. This is effective for those families where there are problems associated with domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and mental health problems.
25. The Social Care in Partnership with Schools scheme (SCIPS) operates in 23 schools, with three social workers working with school staff, health visitors and school nurses to support families with emerging problems. To date, 216 families have received SCIP support. The Stronger Families programme has worked with 360 families with a range of problems, with good progress made in all cases. This work is led by the multi-agency Stronger Families Team located with the local authority's MARAT. They undertake assessments, using the common assessment framework (CAF), which provide a sound basis for effective work with families.
26. CAFs are well written. The reason for the assessment is clearly recorded and there is a thorough analysis of the issues and concerns. Issues are prioritised well. The voice of the child is threaded throughout the CAF and there is a thorough account of the needs of individuals as well as progress made. The CAF assessment is being used widely by professionals, but some early help professionals are opting to use other forms of assessment because they say the CAF takes too long to complete. Although this is not affecting the good quality of service provided, it does mean that families do not experience a consistent approach from agencies that they have contact with, leading to some duplication.
27. Information sharing between partner agencies is routine and embedded in systems and processes. When cases are referred to children's social care through the MARAT, consent is routinely sought from parents to share information where necessary and this is recorded in children's case notes. The MARAT is multi-agency, and well established, so information is quickly shared and evaluated by professionals. Although the electronic record systems of the different agencies are not integrated, defined processes ensure that there is prompt information sharing; for example, between police and children's social care in relation to CSE. CAFs are logged in the 'eCAF' module of the electronic social care record (ESCR), and this supports efficient information-sharing and reduces the need for children and parents to repeat their story more than once.

28. The threshold for access to children's social care is well understood by professionals in all agencies and applied appropriately by staff in the MARAT. The very large majority of referrals are appropriate. Professionals from across the partnership have ready access to social work consultation through the MARAT, and inspectors saw this leading to appropriate interventions to help children. Good use is made of the agreed single agency referral form. Cases are stepped down from social care to universal services appropriately when needs have been met, and stepped up when a need for social care intervention is identified.
29. Guidance for frontline staff in the MARAT is clear and they have ready access to social work advice. All decisions about next steps are taken by suitably-qualified social work personnel. Decisions are clearly recorded, and in most cases the rationale is clearly stated. Case records consistently show evidence of good management oversight. Almost all decisions seen in MARAT are appropriate, though in two cases seen by inspectors involving domestic abuse, decisions to take no further action were premature, and these children were subject to a repeat referral before action was taken. All contacts, including those with new information on existing cases, are promptly dealt with. There are no unallocated contacts or referrals. MARAT staff routinely let professionals know the outcome of their referrals to children's social care.
30. The out-of-hours emergency duty team (EDT) liaises well with day-time services. All actions taken by EDT are recorded on the ESCR and sent to the MARAT promptly. This minimises delay in follow-up.
31. Help provided by children's social care is proportionate to risk. Child protection strategy meetings are attended by an exceptionally wide range of professionals; they are well recorded and result in a clear set of actions. Child protection investigations under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (S47s) are timely and thorough. Managers provide good oversight, involve a range of agencies appropriately, and effectively identify whether a child is at significant risk of harm. Decisions to progress from a child protection enquiry to an initial child protection conference (ICPC) are appropriate and timely and thresholds are consistently applied. Police protection powers are used sparingly, but used appropriately when there is a need to provide immediate protection.

32. Social care assessments are carried out in a timescale that reflects the child's needs. Assessments are comprehensive and include good consideration of the child's current circumstances, history and, in all cases seen, a clear analysis of need which is sharply focused on risks and protective factors. Assessments routinely include good consideration of the child's wishes and feelings. Risk factors such as those indicating neglect and sexual exploitation are recognised and inform planning and intervention. Social workers are using chronologies held on the case records and this is helping to improve the quality of their assessments. The quality of these is at least adequate, and in some cases better. Very few assessments are explicitly informed by research, and they show a lack of attention to issues of equality, diversity and identity. However, those completed by the CANs team have a good focus on issues of disability. Assessments inform the development of child in need and child protection plans well, and this leads to help that focuses on identified need. Assessments are updated for reviews, child protection conferences and child in need meetings or when their circumstances change. Where risk remains, good use is made of the Public Law Outline (PLO) to consider and plan next steps. Where necessary, children come into the care of the local authority appropriately.
33. Help for children in need is provided in line with a plan. These reflect the assessments completed, and are outcome focused. They include some specific objectives but can be vague in relation to the stated outcomes and timescales. They do not explicitly identify what progress needs to be made. However, the exemplary use of a specialist independent IRO to oversee and chair case reviews for the 80 children with the highest level of need ensures that progress is evaluated thoroughly and recorded. The parents that were seen as part of this inspection reported that they really valued this approach. Cases show clear progress, stability and good outcomes for children, with parents well engaged in promoting children's welfare. This has contributed to a 12% reduction in the number of children on a child protection plan between 31 March 2014 and the time of the inspection.

34. Priority is given to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children who need protection. The very large majority (90%) of ICPCs are held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting, as required by statutory guidance. This is very good performance when measured against similar councils (73%) and the England average (69% in 2013–14). ICPCs are well attended by multi-agency professionals. Social work reports to ICPCs provide a good assessment of risks and protective factors, and minutes show that they are evaluated thoroughly, leading to appropriate decisions to safely reduce risk posed to children. At the end of March 2014, 57% of all children on a child protection plan were categorised as experiencing or being at risk of emotional harm and 40% had a plan for neglect. The local authority and its partners recognised that the category for emotional harm was being over-used and neglect under-used, and have taken action to ensure a better understanding of the categories. At the end of January 2015, the respective figures for emotional abuse and neglect were 47% and 48%. Inspectors saw no recent cases where an inappropriate category was used. This means that risks are understood better and service responses are closely matched to meet the individual needs of children and their families.
35. Child protection plans are outcome focused but do not all spell out what needs to be done clearly enough. As a consequence it is not clear what success will look like. Instead, they are task-oriented. Progress is evaluated at review child protection conferences (RCPCs), which also provide effective challenge. For example, in one case seen a recommendation that a plan should end was rightly challenged assertively by the IRO chairing the meeting and the recommendation made by the social worker was not accepted. When RCPCs decide to end a child protection plan, good practice ensures an outline child in need plan is established for the next phase of the work with the family. In cases examined by inspectors, the decisions made at RCPC about whether a plan should continue were appropriate in the light of progress made and the improvement in outcomes.
36. In response to the high rate of children being made subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time (23%, compared with a statistical neighbour average of 15% and England average of 16% in 2013–14), the local authority has established a system of 'plenary meetings'. These follow ICPCs where a decision is made to place a child on a child protection plan within twelve months of the end of the previous plan. Plenary meetings involve professional participants in the ICPC, including the chair and the chair of the RCPC involved in the decision to end the previous plan. Findings from this process are reported upwards to senior leaders and the LSCB, and inform training, policy and guidance. For example, IROs have been provided with additional training in guiding conferences on disguised compliance in domestic abuse cases in response to a plenary meeting finding that this had been missed. This approach is good practice, helping to drive change and learning, but it has not yet had a demonstrable impact on reducing numbers, though it has already helped to improve social work practice leading to improved outcomes for children.

37. Social workers are persistent in trying to engage those parents who are resistant to working with them or where chaotic lifestyles make it hard to form relationships with them. Examples were seen of social workers taking assertive action to protect children in these situations.
38. Child protection core groups are held regularly and in line with timescales required by guidance. Core group meetings involve parents and relevant professionals, including, where appropriate, professionals from adult mental health and drug/alcohol services. Most records made of core group meetings fail to provide a clear picture of progress against objectives; in some cases, this is a result of the weaknesses in the detail of some child protection plans. Of the eight records examined, only two are judged good. Nevertheless, close scrutiny of the individual case work undertaken with families confirmed that social work practice has ensured that child protection plans are progressed effectively; parents understand what they need to do to reduce risks posed to their children, the progress they have made and what remains to be done.
39. The CANs team provides children, young people and their families with good support at the right level. The innovative use of personalised budgets enables flexible provision to meet needs in line with the child's or family's wishes. Co-location of children's social care staff with other professionals, such as physiotherapists and speech and language therapists, ensures that there is effective communication and joint planning. Few children with additional needs have been identified as being in need of protection, but when this does happen, decision-making and actions are prompt and appropriate.
40. Children are firmly at the centre of practice in the very large majority of cases. There is evidence that children's views influence significant decisions about their future. Social workers know children well and understand their needs. The large majority of case files provide a clear picture of the child's life and their wishes and feelings. Records show that social workers visit children regularly and spend time working directly with them. The local authority has identified that social workers do not always see them alone and the reason for this is not always clearly recorded on the ESCR. Senior managers have a strong grip on this area of work, supported by clear reporting arrangements, and they actively challenge frontline social workers' practice to be assured that children are seen and seen alone in accordance with the frequency specified in their child protection plan.

41. Children's views are sought according to their age and understanding for child protection conferences through direct contact and the child-friendly and provision has also been made for children who want to make their views known though the use of an electronic system. In a very small number of cases, children have attended conferences to present their views themselves. Where children are pre-verbal, records include observation and analysis of their life experience. Children with additional needs who have a child protection plan and who need help to express their views in the child protection process are supported by their schools or social workers, and through a range of measures including use of a picture exchange communication system (PECS). Although there are two examples of children being supported by an independent advocate, this practice is under developed so opportunities for children to express their views are not maximised.
42. Strong partnerships serve to protect children from harm. Children's social care and police have a good, shared understanding of the risks to children from domestic abuse. Police apply thresholds well and make appropriate referrals of children at risk of harm through domestic abuse to children's social care. Monthly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are effective in agreeing protective measures, and participants report that they are challenged and held to account. The integrated multi-agency referral and assessment team ensures that schools are alerted by education welfare officers about pupils affected by domestic abuse. Case sampling shows good information-sharing, shared analysis and robust action to secure the safety and well-being of children. Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) are deployed swiftly to support victims, often making first contact on the day the incident is reported or the next working day.
43. Adult services for parents with mental ill-health, substance misuse and those who experience domestic abuse ensure that issues of concern focus on solutions to safely reduce risk posed to children. They routinely check whether service users are parents, have caring responsibilities or contact with children. Their staff are trained in safeguarding children procedures and practice at the appropriate level. There is evidence in children's case files that professionals share information, seek guidance and make referrals appropriately to children's social care. They contribute to child protection conferences and core groups. At the time of the inspection, 74 mental health service users had parental or other caring responsibilities for children known to children's social care. Of these, 20 are on a child protection plan and the remainder are CiN. The drug and alcohol service, Phoenix Futures, is working with the parents or carers of 90 children known to children's social care and others who are looked after by the authority.

44. Responses to children who go missing from home and care are clearly defined. Police carry out safe and well checks and young people are offered a follow-up interview within 72 hours of their return with a youth worker from the Talkshop service. This is the main support service provided by the local authority to engage this group of vulnerable children. From April to December 2014, 243 children and young people were reported as missing. Of these, 68 had return interviews and 93 spoke to a youth worker by telephone. Others received information and advice in leaflet format. Just under 100 of these young people engaged with the youth service and 30 entered into work focused specifically on sexual exploitation. Records are shared with children's social care, and Talkshop staff have access to the children's social care ESCR system. Records of return interviews show that key questions are asked, including where the child was while missing, and risk factors are identified, so that professionals can identify trends or hotspots to inform decisions and actions. The local authority acknowledges that records do not contain sufficient detailed analysis of the likelihood of further episodes or actions to mitigate risks and there are firm plans in place to address this weakness.
45. Inspectors spoke with a number of young people who are at risk because of missing episodes or exposure to possible or actual sexual exploitation. These paint a vivid and moving picture of outstanding support delivered with great sensitivity and persistence by youth workers. The young people all said that their lives would have been much worse without this support, and that it has helped them to protect themselves from serious harm.
46. When children are missing from education, there is extensive partnership working through MARAT to triangulate information and where necessary MARAT will work with the Behaviour and Attendance Service (Education) to achieve a resolution. Effective multi-agency links enable a thorough consideration of risk factors such as CSE and a good coordinated response. The number of children missing from education reduced from six in September 2014 to one in February 2015. Assessments indicate that none of these children were identified as having been at risk of sexual exploitation. When required, effective support is in place for those children who are home educated. In the past year, 18 children and young people have been electively home educated (EHE). Fourteen of these have since returned to school.
47. Help for those children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation is well coordinated and readily available. Trafford operates a multi-agency Sexual Exploitation and Missing (SEAM) panel. This panel considers and monitors all CSE referrals to ensure that appropriate plans and responses are in place for each young person identified to be at risk. IROs are made aware of recommendations made by the panel so that they can follow them up appropriately at child protection conferences and child in need and looked after children reviews. Between April 2014 and the end of January 2015, 54 children and young people were referred to the SEAM panel.

48. There are strong arrangements for responding to allegations about risk presented by adults in a position of trust in relation to children. The local authority designated officer (LADO) initiates action appropriately in respect of such allegations. All LADO cases seen by inspectors demonstrate a good response, with prompt and appropriate steps taken to protect children and active follow-up to ensure that outcomes for children are good. Head teachers spoke very positively about the role of the LADO, as they can access advice and guidance to support their work.
49. Only a very small number of children are identified as privately fostered, despite extensive efforts by the local authority to raise awareness, such as the good links with schools to promote awareness of this issue. Assessments and support for those children who have been identified are good. All actions arising from the earlier private fostering inspection have been completed.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Leaders and senior managers are well informed and plan effectively to meet the needs of looked after children. The well established and effective arrangements for joint working, delivered through the integrated service model involving health, social care and education, result in holistic plans for children. This work is supported by high standards of social work practice, leading to good outcomes for children.</p> <p>The passionate commitment and persistence of all staff involved with care leavers is a strong feature of the service. Care leavers experience good access to advice and support and excellent quality accommodation; a very high proportion of care leavers are in employment, education or training.</p> <p>The local authority has high aspirations for the children in its care, who have good access to high quality education and leisure opportunities. A large proportion of looked after children attend good or better schools where they make good progress.</p> <p>Elected members and strategic leaders give high priority to looked after children and the Corporate Parenting Board provides strong leadership and champions the needs of looked after children. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is well supported and has had a measurable impact on service improvements.</p> <p>Social work practice actively supports good engagement with looked after children. Children’s views are used well to inform their assessments and plans to a high standard. The quality of social work assessments is generally good. Social workers and managers are able to articulate appropriate objectives and timescales for children, but these are not always clearly recorded in children’s care plans.</p> <p>A high proportion of looked after children live in good or better homes where they thrive. Health outcomes are good and effective support for children with complex needs has prevented unnecessary moves for children. Insufficient priority is given to ensuring that children who could benefit from an independent visitor have access to the service.</p> <p>There is a prompt response to permanence plans for children, with improving performance on adoption leading to good matching of children with families, but the use of SGOs (special guardian orders) remains low. Family finding practice is sophisticated, persistent and successful. The quality of adopter assessments is consistently good and some are excellent, although delay was identified in a small number of the cases sampled.</p>	

50. Decision making to support children on the edge of care and those entering local authority care is robust. Senior managers are always consulted about the decision to look after a child or young person. These decisions are informed by a thorough assessment of the child's circumstances and possible alternatives to care. Thresholds are well understood by social workers and are applied consistently. There are no examples of children entering the care system unnecessarily.
51. The number of children and young people looked after by the local authority has been steadily rising as a result of the authority's policy of supporting older young people (16-plus) within the looked after system more effectively and for longer. Overall, the authority is able to demonstrate that it understands and is able to plan for present and future service demand and to achieve good outcomes for children, despite the recent increase in numbers.
52. Provision for the support of children with complex needs is well developed. Over time, the local authority has developed an impressive range of effective services, including a Multi-Systemic Therapy programme (MST), an outreach service, and specialist foster carers (Me2). Many of these services have been developed to help provide effective support for children on the edge of care. They are also used flexibly to provide good support for both short-term and permanent placements, and to support effective support for children and young people to return home when this is in their best interests. Responsibility for decision making is clearly defined. The use of specialist placements for children is overseen by a multi-disciplinary placements panel. Managers on the panel have the delegated authority to make flexible, child-centred decisions to ensure that children's changing needs are met and placements do not breakdown unnecessarily.
53. Legal planning meetings and professional meetings are used effectively to ensure that decisions to start legal proceedings are carefully considered. Social workers produce high quality, holistic assessments and reports, and the PLO is used well to avoid unnecessary delay for children. The local authority's performance for the timely completion of care proceedings has improved significantly and is currently in line with the national target of 26 weeks. The authority has a good working relationship with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the courts.
54. Looked after children experience good health service provision which is underpinned by the highly effective integrated health and children's social care service delivery model. These arrangements are embedded and provide good access to high quality services. For example, the co-location of social workers with health staff and child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) workers supports good access to services for children with complex needs. These arrangements and the authority's long-standing commitment to innovative and evidence-based practice have resulted in continual improvements and better outcomes for children.

55. Health outcomes for looked after children are good. Performance measured by national indicators shows 100% of initial health assessments are completed within 28 days when children first become looked after and 98% of children in care for 12 months have a health assessment completed. Although performance on the percentage of looked after children who have an annual dental check has reduced from 98% to 88%, performance is still above national and statistical neighbour averages. Health service provision is sharply focused on meeting looked after children's needs. This is characterised by the good level of attention given to promoting healthy lifestyles for children through information and advice. This is helping to raise awareness with children under 10 years old to the risks posed by smoking cigarettes and misusing alcohol. With older children this awareness raising includes aspects of their sexual health. The completion of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire, as part of the health assessment process, is helping to harness the views of children to influence the shape of the service they receive. The service has agreed clear referral pathways to Phoenix Futures, a drug and alcohol services for young people, so they get the service they need early.
56. The CAMHS for looked after children is responsive and accessible. Carers and social workers receive consultation and advice within one or two days of referral and the service provides 'KEEP' training, for foster carers so that they are better equipped to support children to prevent placements breaking down unnecessarily. CAMHS provides support to the Me2 and MST programmes to ensure that the children with the most complex level of need are supported effectively. Where children need a more intensive individual service they may wait up to 16 weeks, but the service will respond more quickly if the need is urgent. CAMHS also provides advice and consultation for children who are placed outside the area who are receiving a service from another CAMHS.
57. Children with a disability who are looked after experience good access to specialist services. Social workers are managed and co-located with health colleagues including physiotherapists, psychologists and speech and language therapists. This ensures that children's health and disability needs are comprehensively assessed and fully integrated into their plans. Good provision is made for children and families, who benefit from a short break through the dedicated Short Term Break service, and the authority also provides additional respite arrangements for children who are placed with independent providers to ensure children's individual needs are closely met.
58. Social work practice ensures that children who experience bullying or become victims of homophobic bullying are offered help and well supported. Although some good practice was seen, assessments and plans do not always ensure that children's racial origin is sufficiently considered and their needs sufficiently reflected in their plans. Managers identified equality and diversity as an area for improvement following a peer review in 2013, and this area of social work practice is subject to an action plan which is being closely monitored, but progress has been slow.

59. Children experience a good level of engagement with the professionals involved in their care. Children are listened to; social workers know them well and see them alone. The local authority is committed to ensuring that the voice of the child is heard and taken into account in planning and in the delivery of services; action taken by the authority to improve this area of practice has been effective, and includes clear recording of direct contact with children in chronologies and reports for children's reviews. In 11 of the tracked and sampled cases, where the voice of the child was explored by inspectors, it was found to have been captured and considered very well by their social worker in nearly all cases. Children participate in 90% of looked after children reviews; although only 34% attend their review meetings, the majority of children use the Viewpoint service to make their views known. IROs actively promote the role of independent visitors, but only four young people have benefited from this personalised support.
60. Young people who talked to inspectors are aware of their rights and entitlements, including how to access information available on the local authority website. An online system to encourage children and young people to record their views has been purchased by the authority, and is being promoted by social workers and IROs. Young people are increasingly using this system so their views are known and acted on by the local authority. The local authority also distributes an annual questionnaire to children and young people, and the results are analysed and published. This has resulted in a 'we said, they did' leaflet which sets out the actions taken by the service to address the issues raised by children and young people. Examples from the long list of actions include: support for driving lessons; improvements in the IRO service; a commitment to use the Pupil Premium to deliver resources to individual children; and gym membership.
61. There is an active, ambitious and developing children in care council (CiCC), which has regular positive contact with senior managers, who they know well. The CiCC participates in the Corporate Parenting Board and is encouraged to contribute to service development and improvement in areas such as the local authority's pledge to children and young people in care and the annual questionnaire. CiCC members have also been part of the selection process for senior staff in the local authority, including interviews leading to the appointment of the current Chief Executive.
62. Social workers know the children in their care well; in almost all cases, they are able to give a good account of the child's circumstances and assessed needs. Although social workers are visiting children regularly to meet their individual needs and respond to their changing circumstances, a small number of children who are well settled where they live do not receive a visit by their social worker within the frequency required by regulations. The local authority is monitoring this area of work closely.

63. Overall the quality of children's assessments is good, but in a minority of cases social workers did not consider all relevant information in their assessments, so plans were not sufficiently robust. There are effective joint systems in place, led by the police, to assess and manage the risks to children and young people who go missing from care. When they return, young people are almost always seen by the police and their social worker and they are also encouraged to take up the offer of a return interview. In eight out of nine cases where this aspect was explored by an inspector, these arrangements worked well and the young person concerned cooperated with plans to address their needs and keep them safe. The links between going missing and risk of sexual exploitation are well understood by social workers and managers and inform their response to young people's risk-taking behaviour.
64. A wide range of placements is available to meet the needs of looked after children, including well managed access to in-house and external foster carers and children's homes. The placement manager has management responsibility for the authority's fostering and children's home provision. Robust arrangements are in place to monitor the use of external residential provision on an individual case basis, supported by routine visits made by the placement manager with children's social workers to ensure that they are able to meet the changing needs of the children concerned.
65. The vast majority of children are placed in good or better service provision. Two of the three local authority's own children's homes are judged good or better. Although the third home was judged adequate at the last inspection, the authority has been working to improve it, including employing a permanent Registered Manager.
66. The small number of young people who are placed outside the local area are well supported and receive a good service. They are visited regularly and their health, education and contact with family are well planned and monitored. Where concerns emerge or standards drop after a child is placed, there are clear arrangements for assessing and monitoring the provider's ability to continue to meet the needs of the child or young person in placement.
67. The local authority fostering service provides a good service for children. It has challenging but realistic targets for the recruitment of new foster carers to meet the specific needs of the current and projected population of looked after children. These form part of the authority's well-researched sufficiency strategy. The fostering panel is well managed, effective and meets three times per month, so decisions about children's placements are timely and children do not experience delay. Children are carefully matched with appropriate carers or placements according to their assessed needs. Carers receive regular, high quality supervision from their supervising social workers, which is monitored by the fostering service team manager.

68. Life story work is given high priority and the quality of this work is good. Managers actively promote this work with social workers in their supervision and IROs provide effective challenge at children's reviews. Foster carers and social workers are provided with training in this area, and carers are provided with memory boxes to store materials which will later help children to understand their histories.
69. In the last year there has been a significant increase from 31% to 58% in the number of carers who have successfully evidenced that they have achieved the relevant Training, Support and Development Standard. This is now in line with the national average of 57%, having been promoted through the payment for skills scheme, which was introduced so that carers' payments are clearly linked to their level of training. Managers are confident that this will act as a further incentive for more carers to take up offers of training. Complaints and allegations against foster carers are well managed and recorded. Foster carers are aware of the need for transparency in this area and all carers have access to independent support facilitated by the local authority.
70. Foster carers, including family and friends carers, are complimentary about the supervision, support and training, including the online courses, they receive. Foster carers report that there has been an improvement in the amount and quality of information they receive from social workers before children are placed, which is helping them to meet the needs of children. Carers feel they are treated with respect as colleagues and that their contribution to children's plans is valued. Foster carers receive mandatory training in safe care, health and safety, and equality and diversity, and all carers seen had also accessed the authority's KEEP training programme which they value. There are active carers' forums which provide peer support and representation. The authority has developed an impressive, innovative, specialist fostering scheme, Me2, which has had a positive impact for young people with challenging behaviour, to avoid the breakdown of their placement wherever possible. In the previous two years the Me2 service provided effective support for children to return to live with their own families leading to a successful and sustained return home for 15 out of 19 children and young people involved.
71. Children and young people do not experience a large number of moves once they are placed. The authority's performance in respect of placement stability is very good at the time of the inspection, with 80% of children who have been looked after for two and a half years or more in the same placement for the last two years. Very few children (3%) have experienced three or more placement changes in the last 12 months. Good arrangements are in place to support young people to remain with their foster carers after they reach the age of 18 if this is in their best interests and the foster carer is in agreement. This 'staying put' arrangement is also available to young people who are placed with carers from independent fostering agencies. This was helping to provide effective support to meet the needs of all three young people sampled by inspectors.

72. Stability and permanence plans are promoted effectively for most children. This is supported by the good use of planning meetings, including legal planning meetings, and an effective placement panel. However, for a small number of children a permanence plan has not been determined by the time of their second review, so outcomes for these children are less clear. IROs are closely monitoring this area of work to ensure that children do not experience unnecessary delay. SGOs are under used, with only four children experiencing this route to permanence last year. However, they are increasingly being considered as a permanence option for children, with plans for seven children currently being explored.
73. Although IROs have high caseloads, they challenge practice well to encourage high standards and better outcomes for children and young people, and children's progress is tracked effectively between their reviews. Effective planning ensures that brothers and sisters are placed together unless their assessed needs indicate otherwise. Contact arrangements are routinely and carefully assessed and considered in children's reviews. IROs instigate the dispute resolution process effectively to ensure that plans for children are progressed, and performance on the timely completion of looked after children's statutory reviews is very good at 99%.
74. Education outcomes for children are effectively promoted. The Virtual Head Teacher has a clear strategic vision and drive for improvement. The completion of personal education plans (PEPs) has improved term by term. All looked after children now have a PEP and this success is attributed to the work done by the newly appointed PEP Coordinator. Almost all (99%) PEPs have been completed within timescales. Priorities are identified, 'rag' rated and resources identified. As a result, children and young people are supported to reach their full potential. The need for any specialist support is addressed in a timely manner.
75. The PEP is used effectively to monitor pupil premium expenditure to support both academic and pastoral needs of looked after children. Rigorous monitoring and tracking systems are in place. The monthly resource panel reviews progress and engagement against the PEP targets. Appropriate challenge is provided by the Corporate Parenting Board Education Group.
76. Most school-aged looked after children (86%) attend good or better schools, with 39% in outstanding schools; 100% of post-16 pupils are in good or better provision. Careful consideration is given to the individual needs of the eight pupils who attend schools judged to require improvement and the 25 pupils in inadequate schools, and their progress is closely monitored.

77. Attendance is improving and reached its highest level in the autumn term, rising from 94% to 96%. On average, attendance is now only one per cent below the national average for all children. Welfare Call is a commissioned service which monitors the daily attendance of looked after children, and swift action is taken when attendance reduces. There have been no permanent exclusions in this academic year, and of the 14 pupils excluded for a fixed term this academic year, all pupils are now back in school.
78. There is an upward trend in the proportion of looked after children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, from 14% in 2013 to 38% in 2014, but this is below the Trafford average of 69% and the national average of 60% compared to the general population. Good links are in place with the Early Years Consultant, who has allocated time for the virtual school children, which is driving improvement. Good lines of communication are also in place between the consultant, the three children's centre groups and provision in the private, voluntary and maintained sector.
79. The attainment of Trafford's looked after children is significantly better than the attainment of looked after children nationally at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. Progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is good. Out of 15 pupils 80% made the expected level of progress in mathematics and 93% made expected levels of progress in reading at Key Stage 2. This is better than the national results for the general cohort where 91% of children achieved expected progress in reading and 89% in mathematics. At Key Stage 2 the percentage of looked after children in Trafford who achieved level four in reading was 91% compared with 68% of all children nationally. Mathematics also improved with 64% of looked after children in Trafford obtaining level four or above compared with 61% of all children nationally. The percentage of looked after children achieving level four at Key Stage 2 has improved since 2012 by 18%, in reading and 11%, in mathematics. This achievement reflects a rapid narrowing of the gap in attainment between looked after children and their peers in Trafford, by 17% for reading and 23% for mathematics since 2012.
80. The attainment and progress of looked after children in secondary schools are very good. The proportion of looked after children achieving five GCSE's A*-C including English and mathematics has risen from 21% in 2012 to 32% in 2014. This is significantly above the national average of 15% for looked after children and also that of statistical neighbours at 12.9%. The gap between looked after children and other children living in Trafford has reduced from 51% to 39%. It is a testament to the success of looked after children that there are examples of young people accessing grammar school places.
81. Children's leisure and specific interests are also effectively promoted. The local authority issues children with a junior active leisure card, which provides subsidised access to all leisure centres in the borough. Children are also supported to pursue special interests such as sports and music tuition, which is adding to the richness of children's lives so that they can reach their potential and feel fulfilled.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is that it is good

82. Senior leaders and managers demonstrate a clear commitment and determination to secure permanence for children through the use of adoption. Adoption is actively considered in the care planning and review process for children when it is not safe or appropriate for them to return to live with their birth parents and where permanence within their extended family is not appropriate or achievable. Effective systems and alerts are in place to ensure that the adoption team is aware of those children at the earliest opportunity. The adoption manager attends legal planning meetings to obtain information and offer advice. He can access the legal proceedings tracker and meets regularly with the lead legal officer to ensure accuracy of information and that any potential delays are identified and minimised.
83. Twin tracking of the child's plan begins promptly when legal proceedings are issued or at the point of commencing the PLO process. The adoption social worker and team manager meet with the birth parents to explain the twin tracking process. Work begins on the child's placement report quickly so that it is ready for the adoption panel and to share with other agencies and adopters. Children's profiles are drafted and professional photographs and DVDs of children are produced. Good use is made of the up-to-date intelligence of adopters available within the Four4Adoption collaboration. This can identify very early links that are not actively pursued until the placement order is granted. This contributes positively to reducing the time that children wait.
84. As soon as a placement order is granted, family finding activity accelerates. Children benefit from being matched and placed quickly because staff have already established if they need to extend the search regionally, using well-established links in Adoption 22, a consortium of 22 local authorities in the north west of England, target specialist voluntary adoption agencies or to initiate a national search for a suitable family. Funding is available for child-specific recruitment and assessment by specialist agencies. Overall, family finding practice in Trafford is sophisticated, persistent and successful. As a result, adopters have been identified for five out of six children waiting for a permanent adoptive family.

85. In the last twelve months adoption orders have been granted for ten children, which has led to improved outcomes for these children. Timeliness for these children when measured against the indicators on the national scorecard shows good progress, with seven of them being placed within the required timescale. The authority's performance for placing children as measured by the adoption scorecard over the last three years requires further improvement, which the authority has acknowledged. The scorecard three year average shows the authority to take 190 days more than the national average to place a child for adoption from entering care and to take 200 days longer to place a child after an order has been obtained. Figures show the overall performance being influenced by a dip in 2012-13 with significantly better performance from 2013 onwards. The adoption team and senior managers have a good understanding of why performance dipped in 2012-13. Close scrutiny of the individual cases concerned determined that seven children in the cohort had highly complex needs and were difficult to place. The authority demonstrated a determination to find families for these children as this was the right plan despite the challenges. The impact of this will continue to be reflected in the scorecard until 2016.
86. The authority is committed to maintaining a strong focus on adoption as a viable option for permanence for children, and good processes are in place to support this through robust tracking and monitoring arrangements. There is strong evidence of a trend of improvement in both of the key indicators starting in 2013. The local authority has projected further improvement over time.
87. Strong, effective and collaborative recruitment and preparation training is delivered through the award winning Four4adoption partnership with neighbouring authorities, which ensures that there is a growing pool of adopters and choice for children. Adopters receive a streamlined and well-coordinated service and consistent information with a comprehensive pack, including information about adoption support. The effective use of a screening tool establishes eligibility to adopt and makes an initial assessment of what the applicant could offer for Trafford's children. Applicants are sensitively signposted to other agencies and information sources as appropriate. Enquiries are promptly followed up with home visits and applicants can get on to the Stage One preparation groups quickly and anywhere across the Four4adoption collaboration. All adopters spoken to commented very positively about their experience, its timeliness and the impact of the high quality of training.
88. The quality of social workers' written assessments is consistently good, increasingly analytical and in some cases, excellent. Experienced staff skilfully and appropriately challenge and stretch adopters to consider their capacity to parent and, support contact with siblings, accept children with complex backgrounds and foster to adopt. Adopters spoken to are unanimously positive about their experience of assessment and one said 'it was thorough, in depth but not rushed'.

89. The local authority is successfully increasing the number of available adopters, with 32 approved in the last 12 months, so there are more adopters than there are children waiting to be matched. Staff work hard to ensure that they are considered by other agencies, so that other children can be adopted and the waiting time is reduced for those adopters. Inter-agency fees received are used well to improve the service. Despite the strong performance on recruitment, there is further room for improvement in the timeliness at stage one and two of the recruitment process. Out of 19 adopters who ended stage one in the 12 months prior to the inspection, 14 were in timescales. Out of the five which were not in timescales two were due to service related issues. Out of 25 adopters who completed stage two in the 12 months prior to the inspection 19 were completed in timescale. Out of six which were not completed in timescale four were due to issues out of the local authority's control and two were due to deferrals at panel. Staff are alert to the reasons for this and there is learning that can be used to address delays, for example, from the adoption panel feedback so that cases don't have to be deferred unnecessarily for social workers to do further work or to gather more information. The very experienced independent adoption panel chair considers that the quality of assessments and matching is consistently good. There is robust scrutiny and challenge by the chair and panel members, contributing to learning and leading to continual improvement in practice. The panel meets twice a month, to respond to children's needs and reduce delays. There is a good professional working relationship between the chair and the agency decision maker. There have not been any significant differences of view or rejection of panel recommendations.
90. Good, responsive support for children and families after placement helps children to develop secure relationships and avoids disruptions. Children and their families receive responsive and high quality social work support and well informed advice and guidance. Life story work is given high priority and children have life story books at the time of their placement. Later life letters are timely. Adopters value the dedicated service from a specialist adoption psychologist. AdOpt training is available, led by Trafford, which uses learning from disruptions and focuses on parenting older adopted children and identity issues.
91. Post-order adoption support is good. Adopters receive good information about the offer available at enquiry stage and throughout their individual adoption 'journeys'. The Letterbox service currently coordinates indirect contact for 108 children, and 22 children and 18 families are receiving social work support from the team. A further 39 adopted children are being supported by the specialist adoption psychologist service. For some this is in addition to the social work input, but others have accessed the provision through universal services. The adoption support team also provides counselling for birth parents and adult adoptees.

The graded judgment about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is outstanding

92. Care leavers are highly satisfied with the level of service they receive. Corporate parents have ensured that there is a wide range and choice of suitable accommodation options for young people along the continuum of readiness for independence, with 100% of care leavers reporting that they feel safe and that they live in suitable accommodation.
93. Care leavers receive an exceptionally high quality service from the local authority and partner agencies, which has been sustained over time and has delivered many benefits for care leavers. Progression to a 'gold standard' service has been due in part to the opportunity seized by senior managers to participate in the national New Belongings project. Trafford is one of the nine local authorities involved, and leads a North West cluster of local authorities. The project is working to implement the principles and concepts of 'Access All Areas', to promote access to education and employment and the Charter for Care Leavers operationally at a local level.
94. Participation in the New Belongings project has enabled a systemic focus on the priorities set as a result of the consultation with care leavers, and all of these have been achieved. There has been excellent, high level support from Corporate Parents, for example, the speedy implementation of the very effective pre-payment card so that young people can access their funds quickly. There are many examples of highly effective and embedded partnership working, effective and sustained engagement and listening to young people. This has resulted in good action planning to deliver necessary changes. The research base and external rigour and challenge provided by the New Belongings project, and the involvement of two care leavers, have each added value. The palpable and passionate commitment and persistence by all the staff involved with care leavers to 'provide realistic experiential learning opportunities for young people is one of the most impressive aspects of the service.

95. Engagement with care leavers is very good. The service knows where all their care leavers are and has appropriate levels of contact with each individual based on their personal needs and pathway planning. A strong feature is the persistence and commitment of staff to support young people and get the best for them. Staff make dogged efforts to engage with young people and to come up with ideas and opportunities to motivate them. Workers are highly responsive to changing needs and offer help by increasing their visiting, signposting to other agencies and through creatively reviewed support packages. Young people, who have a chaotic life style, are hard to engage or whose behaviours lead to eviction from their accommodation, for example, are very well supported.
96. Care leavers are encouraged to complete an independent living assessment through the use of a work book, a tool used to assess their independent living skills, to identify progress and gaps in their knowledge. They then receive specific training to meet the needs. The service has a graduated and staged approach for young people to move from being in care to independence, and this is reflected and met by the range of accommodation and support packages available.
97. Multi-agency team working is completely embedded and the looked after children nurses provide good support and advice, information and signposting for young people post-16 and care leavers. Talk Shop provides a valued specialist advice and information service for young people. Those young people who need it receive effective support with drug and alcohol misuse issues from Phoenix Futures. Access to and intervention by CAMHS is good, with support going up to age 18. Young people receive a health care booklet at the age of 18 which contains all the necessary and relevant information available to the looked after children health team to enable young people to take charge of their future health care arrangements.
98. Well advanced plans are in place to formalise transition arrangements for care leavers into adult services. Young people who will need ongoing support have their needs assessed jointly with adult services soon after their 16th birthday, so that there are no interruptions or delays in receiving help and the support services they need.
99. The care leavers who talked to inspectors are well aware of, and often knowledgeable about, their entitlements, and how to find out if they were unsure. . The service uses questionnaires and surveys to check whether young people know about their rights and to identify areas for improvement. Information is available through the local authority website, the Care Leavers Charter and the comprehensive guides to leaving care, which include information on financial support and accommodation options. The guides and website provide a range of useful links for young people to use.

100. There is a single point of entry through HOST (housing options service Trafford) and good emergency arrangements to meet the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. This is underpinned by effective support packages, from 24/7 on-site support to bespoke packages of floating support. There is no use of bed and breakfast or houses of multiple occupation. The local authority makes effective use of the North West 16-plus Framework, collaborative commissioning arrangements, to obtain suitable placements for young people with high levels of need. Staying Put is established, with 18 young people in placement. A strong supported lodgings resource for 16 to 21 year-olds has provided up to 24 placements. All care leavers are given the highest priority banding for housing.
101. There has been an in-year rise in the number of care leavers in EET (education, employment and training) from an already good position of 73% of 19 to 21 year-old care leavers in EET in April 2014 to 84% in December 2014. This is an exceptional achievement by the young people and the staff who work with them and is above both the national average and the performance of statistical neighbours. There are 15 young people at university, 49 in further education, six in apprenticeships, 21 with training providers and seven in employment.
102. Innovative strategies are helping care leavers into education, employment and training and providing additional opportunities. These include the 99 Project with a local premier league football club foundation, a pre-employment training and apprenticeship programme, and incentivised activity programmes to encourage young people to seek work or training opportunities with support. Very effective work is done by committed and persistent Personal advisers (PA) and social workers to identify opportunities for young people, and to keep them motivated to access EET as appropriate. Young people on benefits get a very good service as a result of the authority being one of the first to implement a working joint protocol with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This means they have a named DWP personal adviser who liaises with the PA about any issues, in particular failure to attend, which would routinely invoke sanctions and often lead to financial hardship. The protocol provides for time for the PA to seek solutions and prevent sanctions from being imposed.
103. Pathway advisers and senior managers proactively engage with and listen to what young people say, and then act on it. Their voice is heard in face-to-face work on pathway planning and through the care leavers' forum, the CiCC, the annual children in care and care leavers questionnaire and the 'one year on' analysis of progress on delivering the Care Leavers Charter.
104. Robust action plans are made as a result of feedback and shared with young people. Progress is reported to the CiCC, the Corporate Parenting Board and through the New Belongings project. Action is taken promptly on feedback and priorities, for example, the implementation of the pre-payment card, the website and updated care leavers' guide. There is an annual care leavers' week and a celebration event which young people appreciate and enjoy.

105. All the young people who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the service they receive, particularly about their PAs. They feel safe where they live and are pleased with the help they get in finding accommodation. They value highly the help they receive to achieve their aims and aspirations, for example, the opportunity to go to London to find out about universities with staff from the virtual school and the preparation courses which have helped them to succeed in getting an apprenticeship by building up their skills and confidence. One young person said "I really like it when they phone you up to find out how an interview has gone, you feel like they're bothered."

Key judgement	Judgement grade
Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p>Summary</p> <p>The leadership and vision provided by elected members and the multi-agency senior management team is outstanding. This has made a discernible difference, leading an integrated workforce to deliver consistently good services which comprehensively meet the needs of children and families living in Trafford. This work is underpinned by an effective change programme implemented by the DCS and pooled budget arrangements formalised through a Section 75 Agreement (NHS Act 2006).</p> <p>Performance management and quality assurance systems are excellent. As a direct result, good quality services are consistently delivering positive outcomes for children and young people, from those receiving early help right through to young people leaving care. A wide range of routine and bespoke auditing activity that is closely scrutinised leads to good action planning, implementation of change to practice and thorough review. Leaders and managers have an extremely detailed understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and this is helping to inform decisions to sustain good performance and support continual improvement.</p> <p>Corporate parenting is well established and strong. Elected members and senior leaders work together to deliver at least good outcomes for looked after children and outstanding services for care leavers. Political leaders are enthusiastic and passionate and champion the needs of looked after children across the borough.</p> <p>Leaders and managers have effectively created an extremely stable and positive environment for social work to flourish. Recruitment of experienced, well-trained social workers is successful and retention rates are very good. The MARAT makes consistent, timely and well informed decisions that ensure that children at risk of harm are appropriately protected. Effective systems and information sharing practice identify, track and protect those at risk of being exploited or who go missing.</p> <p>The local authority and its partners have a very good record of being an organisation that makes best use of learning drawn from a range of activities. All recommendations from previous inspections have been implemented. For example, those making referrals to the service now always receive a written response and performance is regularly monitored. Although the local authority demonstrates a strong commitment to resolve complaints received from service users and takes them seriously, too many complaints take too long to investigate.</p>	

106. The authority has worked at pace to develop, implement and secure a fully integrated multi-agency service. A strong and well-articulated vision underpins its ambitious and progressive service structure. Strategic and operational integration is supported by an established Section 75 arrangement that covers both commissioning and service perspectives. These arrangements provide effective and appropriate clarity in relation to governance structures. An agreed and easily understood delegated decision list sets out accountability and decision making responsibilities. This ensures that safeguarding decisions, use of budgets and quality assurance standards are appropriate and consistent. The joint DCS/DASS role is subject to comprehensive risk assessment and thoroughly considered succession plans are well underway to provide a smooth transition of responsibilities when the present director leaves imminently. The benefits of the joint role are clearly seen in the very good focus that adult services have on the needs of children.
107. Staff from a range of agencies that include social work, education, health and police are co-located and very effectively managed through one structure. The result is an easily accessible, seamless service without professional barriers that meets the needs of, and provides good outcomes for, children and families. A strong and robust MARAT provides a safe front door to services and demonstrates excellent integrated working. MARAT has access to a wide range of multi-agency IT systems that underpin robust and good quality information sharing to inform decisions and plans. Leaders and managers across the partnership have a very strong 'grip' and this is well demonstrated by the consistent approach taken by practitioners in implementing agreed and fully understood thresholds.
108. Partnership working is of the highest quality and demonstrated both at strategic and operational levels. This is seen in the clearly defined integrated governance arrangements and by good levels of engagement in strategic bodies. Key overarching strategies and plans are of at least good quality, and links in objectives and priorities are aligned so priorities are delivered consistently across agencies. Working arrangements between the LSCB Chair, Director of Children's Service (DCS) and Chief Executive are in line with statutory guidance and are subject to appropriate and formal governance protocols so officers are held to account. Links to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) are strong and the JSNA (joint strategic needs assessment) has a strong focus on the needs of children and young people so local needs are known and priorities shared and understood. The DCS takes an active role in the HWBB and there is a formal partnership agreement in place between the LSCB and the HWBB. The DCS has very strong and direct links with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) so governance is sharply focused, to eliminate duplication and operational delivery is effectively targeted to meet the needs of children and families.

109. Performance management and quality assurance is given the highest priority at all levels of management. Systems are well established and are extremely thorough to meet the needs of a fully integrated service. Reporting arrangements are complex but are understood and demonstrably work well. Effective mechanisms ensure robust and detailed scrutiny of management information and include the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. Detailed oversight of frontline practice is undertaken at a monthly DCS-led safeguarding meeting, where performance down to individual worker level is considered. In addition, a comprehensive range of quality assurance activities inform operational planning and day-to-day work.
110. Audits are routine and undertaken by a range of managers and professionals at all levels of the service. These include case file audits on a six-monthly basis and targeted thematic audits such as chronologies and private fostering. Additionally, bespoke audits are commissioned in response to external findings such as Ofsted's Safeguarding Disabled Children thematic inspection report. Monthly governance visits by the DCS, elected members and senior officers to frontline teams include meeting individual practitioners, and ensure that social worker morale and views are taken into account in service development. Evidence of impact is good, such as in the setting up of a discreet fund to support service users with no recourse to public funds.
111. Actions taken as a result of audit findings are impressive, timely and effective. Managers plan their responses in considered ways; for instance, to improve the quality of children's plans, managers rolled out a programme of training to ensure that all staff understood outcome focussed planning. They allowed time for practice to embed, then audited again; they identified lack of timescales as an issue, and now have plans to deliver further training to ensure the next steps improvement will be delivered. Services that are judged good quality provide evidence of the impact of their strategy.
112. Leaders and managers are highly innovative, take the lead and are at the forefront of much regional and national development work. For example, the timely implementation of personalisation for children with additional and complex needs is impressive and has brought excellent value for money to the local authority. A robust and transparent system, including independent brokers, awards personal budgets to eligible children and young people. Additionally, as part of Operation Challenger, a multi-agency operation set-up to tackle organised crime in Greater Manchester, clearly defined information sharing arrangements are in place across agencies. This collaborative work ensures that children who may be at risk can be identified, assessed and responded to without compromising criminal evidence gathering. In relation to action taken to prevent radicalisation (HM Government, June 2011), leaders and managers acknowledge that progress is not as advanced as in some other local authorities, and action has been stepped up, for example, to roll-out training and deliver presentations to all head teachers and elected members.

113. Evidence demonstrates that effective action is being taken in response to learning from a range of sources, including serious case reviews (SCR). For example, the impressive development of a dedicated IRO post to review child in need cases at risk of escalating to child protection is a direct result of learning from a SCR, and has brought demonstrable benefits through increased oversight, improved CiN plans and a reduction in the number of children subject to a child protection plan. Currently, this post is time limited, and managers must seriously consider the potential risks of not continuing with this service. The authority had not been notifying serious incidents to Ofsted in all cases where it is appropriate to do so and managers acknowledged this. The local protocol was not worded sufficiently clearly to remove doubt as to when notifications are required; the DCS has already taken corrective action to address this.
114. An effective and well-established integrated commissioning unit, managed on behalf of the authority and CCG, ensures that commissioning of all education, health and social care services for children and young people is coordinated and reflects local needs. Future commissioning intentions for 2015–16 and the year following are in place and well developed. For instance, all services on the early help framework will be re-commissioned in line with an agreed new model of early help. The sufficiency duty is met and a wide range of placements are available to meet need, and very good, embedded regional collaboration ensures that purchased provision is monitored routinely and robustly. Children and young people are regularly consulted, and participate in activities that inform strategy development, which in turn shapes commissioning intentions. A good example is the secondary schools conference to inform the Children’s Trust partnership strategy.
115. The Corporate Parenting Board is well established and very effective. The Board has ensured care leavers have access to a range of apprenticeships within the local authority. Good cross-political party priority is given to ensuring that children looked after are safe, and this is underpinned by a dedicated member for safeguarding who sits on the LSCB. The Chief Executive takes an active role as a highly committed corporate parent and has recently made an offer to all 16-plus looked after children to become involved in forthcoming election work. Children looked after have access to an effective children’s rights worker who provides advocacy. However, the use of independent visitors for looked after children and advocacy in child protection is under developed, so children looked after and children subject to child protection processes are not able to access the benefit of such support. Corporate parents are highly ambitious and aspirational. Evidence of their success is seen in the academic progress of children looked after. Progress is very good, on an improving trajectory, and the gap between looked after children and all others is narrowing.

116. Leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on user participation, and the views of children and young people are known and understood through surveys, casework, the Youth Council and the Corporate Parenting Board's engagement with the CiCC. Their views are acted on and influence how services are delivered, such as the resolution of problems that care leavers had in accessing their entitlements. The local authority has a strong commitment to complaints from service users and takes them seriously, but too many take too long to resolve.
117. The authority has a positive relationship with Cafcass and a good reputation in the local courts. Cases are filed on time. The authority responds quickly to safeguarding checks in private law cases and cooperates with arrangements made in court to promote permanence.
118. Social workers are well trained, have manageable caseloads and their interests are very well represented by an established and influential Principal Social Worker. Social workers are extremely tenacious in their efforts to engage with children and families at every part of the service. The pathway for social workers to access the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) is well structured and there are good links to two local universities. Expectations and standards are high and assertive action is taken to manage staff that fall below expected standards to support improvement. The recording of reflective supervision is of variable quality, despite a large investment in training and subsequent audit processes. Social workers can describe good reflective supervision, but only a minority of records demonstrate it sufficiently well. Managers are proactively supporting improvement but this work remains a challenge.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

The arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children are good.

Summary of findings

The LSCB is good because:

Partnership working

- It is a mature, developed and effective partnership which challenges and holds partners to account very well.
- It is an influential strategic partnership that drives and delivers tangible improvement in key areas, such as embedding the early help framework and pathways, strengthening child in need work and ensuring that joint work between agencies is robust and child centred.
- It is a very effective learning organisation that knows itself well. It uses data, learning reviews and audit effectively to understand frontline practice and drive improvement. This leads to better outcomes for children.
- Lessons learnt from the last SCR, held in 2012, have been implemented effectively, and this has improved inter-agency work and frontline practice.

Challenge

- The LSCB has assured itself through multi-agency audit that the work undertaken by agencies to keep children safe is consistently robust and effective.
- Agencies are held to account effectively for their safeguarding responsibilities through the Section 11 audit, the Section 175 audit and a regular rolling programme of robust and thorough critical friend reviews.

Responsiveness

- The LSCB understands the extent of CSE and children who go missing from care, home and education in its area. It uses intelligence about patterns of CSE to disrupt perpetrators and coordinates high quality support to victims, which reduces risk to children. Awareness of CSE in the partnership is good and this is leading to a rising number of referrals received by children's social care.

What does the LSCB need to improve?

Areas for improvement

Quality Assurance, Data and Performance

119. Increase the range of multi-agency performance data and use the JSNA to profile local need in the annual report, in order to strengthen the evaluation of service delivery and inform strategic planning more effectively.
120. Develop working links with the Family Justice Board so that the LSCB can scrutinise work with children in public and private law proceedings.
121. Strengthen the strategic oversight of community safety-led work, particularly work around the Prevent strategy and domestic abuse, to ensure that there are robust, joined-up strategies for children in these areas that address identified need.
122. Develop a plan to raise safeguarding awareness in the wider community and in faith groups and the voluntary and community sector.
123. Ensure that the evaluation of training is robust and uses independent measures to evaluate impact.

Inspection judgement about the LSCB

124. The LSCB is a mature and well-developed partnership which holds partners to account very effectively. This is evidenced through robust and thorough critical friends' reviews, the challenge log and the delivery of strong, joined-up partnership arrangements at the strategic and operational levels.
125. The LSCB is correctly constituted and has a clear governance framework that meets statutory requirements. There are appropriate arrangements in place between the LSCB and the HWBB, Children Trust Board, Safer Trafford Partnership and the Adult Safeguarding Board which are supported by a memorandum of understanding. The governance arrangements between the Chief Executive and LSCB Chair and DCS are clear and appropriate, enabling the Chief Executive to hold the LSCB Chair to account. The priorities of the LSCB are appropriate, accord with local need and are delivered effectively through the LSCB work plan.
126. The LSCB is an influential strategic partner; the priorities of the LSCB and the HWBB are closely aligned and the LSCB has been effective in shaping and driving the early help agenda. It published the early help strategy in May 2013, setting out pathways for early help and clear local thresholds for access to service. These are well understood by partners and the LSCB holds partners to account well through close monitoring for their application of thresholds.

127. The LSCB is a very effective learning organisation that knows itself well. It closely monitors safeguarding performance using data from a range of key areas including, missing from home or care, CSE, domestic violence, early help and mental ill-health and substance misuse. The LSCB investigates trends through the use of targeted case reviews and audits to better understand the underlying reasons for them. This enables the LSCB to have a very good understanding of what is happening in frontline practice and to drive improvement. An example of this is the strengthening of child in need (CiN) and step down processes, which led to a significant reduction in the number of children on child protection plans.
128. The LSCB carries out a wide range of themed, multi-agency audits which engage partners well, and provides accurate and detailed evaluation and analysis of the quality of practice across the partnership. Learning from the LSCB's quality assurance activity is coordinated by the learning and improvement group and summarised in a learning and development report, so that an overview of key lessons can be fed back to agencies, built into training and taken forward with individual agencies in action plans. The LSCB is persistent in targeting change and will re-audit key issues to evaluate if there has been sufficient improvement. One example of this is the use of chronologies by children's social care following the last serious case review, which showed a significant improvement in July 2013 in 64% of cases.
129. The LSCB supplements the Section 11 audit with thorough and robust critical friend reviews of individual agencies. It has carried out six of these in the last two years, which demonstrates the rigour and persistence of the LSCB in driving improvement. This process includes reviewing the senior management arrangements, triangulating this with frontline practice through discussion with frontline workers and audit of cases. This has helped to identify significant areas for improvement in agencies, which are taken forward through action plans overseen by the LSCB. The Section 175 audit revealed that schools had a very high level of compliance with standards.
130. The LSCB has been effective in learning from the last SCR held in 2012. It has been instrumental in raising performance in children's social care in the use of history and chronologies, and the quality of engagement of adult mental health services in safeguarding. Staff spoken to understood the lessons from this SCR and could relate them to their practice.
131. The learning and improvement group reviews cases that potentially meet the threshold for a SCR and makes appropriate decisions around threshold. However, the local authority has not been reporting serious incidents to Ofsted in line with requirements and consequently the LSCB has not been notifying the National Panel of Experts of all decisions not to hold a serious case review. This meant that these decisions were not scrutinised by the Panel. This is acknowledged by the LSCB and has now been rectified.

132. The LSCB is effective in co-ordinating a multi-agency response to CSE and has made good progress in delivering its strategy. Through the SEAM Panel it collates intelligence about CSE across the Trafford area, and has developed a problem profile to understand links between victims and perpetrators, patterns and hotspots. This is used by the police to disrupt perpetrators and ensure that victims receive targeted outreach support. Victims of CSE in Trafford receive proactive and persistent support through Talk Shop, the Young Women's Advocate and the Community Change Foundation. This has achieved a high level of engagement from the young people concerned and is helping to reduce risks.
133. Levels of training on CSE amongst agencies across the partnership is high. Training has been delivered to designated leads in 15 schools, 90% of police officers, the fire service, 25 elected members and 187 members of the health service. There are plans to roll out training to all health staff by the end of the year. All children's social work teams have a CSE champion to raise awareness. This has made a demonstrable difference, leading to a sharp rise in the number of referrals received.
134. There is close oversight by the LSCB of children missing from home, care or education. There has been good progress on raising awareness and building resilience amongst children; 85% of children in Year 7 and above have received advice on CSE at school. The police have provided information to 50 local businesses and local care homes, and the local authority is planning to raise awareness with taxis and hoteliers over the course of the year.
135. A recent audit of cases identified the reasons why children were running away, and learning from this was used to strengthen information sharing arrangements with the police. The LSCB is in the process of analysing the return interviews more fully to identify trends and patterns, to identify how it can reduce incidents. The LSCB is looking to extend its oversight to children missing short periods of education during the day.
136. There is a multi-agency training programme available, which provides a good range of safeguarding training at levels two, three and four as well as an appropriate range of other key areas such as disabled children, CSE, female genital mutilation, safeguarding disabled children, 'honour-based violence' and forced marriage. The LSCB is part of the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership and uses the procedures developed across Manchester available on Greater Manchester Safeguarding Children Board web site. These are up to date, of good quality and cover a comprehensive range of safeguarding areas.
137. The LSCB has encouraged the use of the voice of children to inform service planning and delivery, and this has led to a number of tangible improvements, such as a 25% increase in school nurses, shorter waiting times for CAMHS appointments and commissioning of services to support children in school around anger management.

138. The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) is shared with two other Manchester authorities to cover a population large enough to enable analysis. The annual report provides analysis of child deaths, and breaks down causes by area against a range of factors. The most prevalent modifiable causes of child death are parental smoking and co-sleeping. Trafford has taken steps to ensure that all new parents receive advice around smoking and co-sleeping from health visitors, and this is audited. The number of children dying from these is low.
139. The level of the LSCB's challenge and scrutiny of community safety issues needs to be stronger. Although operational work concerning children around domestic abuse is robust, the strategic arrangements are currently under developed. The take-up of services for early help and therapeutic work is low, and there is a gap in the provision of work with perpetrators. There are high rates of re-victimisation in some localities and in the cases progressed through the MARAC process. Also there is an issue with under reporting of domestic abuse in 16 to 18 year-olds, the Black and minority ethnic community and with parents. The domestic abuse strategy is recent, having been published in 2013, and the action plan is still work in progress. The work of the LSCB on the Prevent strategy is also at a very early stage; it isn't mentioned in the LSCB annual report or in current training.
140. The LSCB does not effectively oversee the Family Justice Board to be assured that it scrutinises the work of public and private proceedings closely to ensure that children's needs are fully met.
141. The LSCB annual report meets statutory requirements and provides an effective analysis of safeguarding performance in Trafford. However, it is too focused on children's social care data and doesn't profile local need drawing on the JSNA. This means that it does not consider how effective the partnership is strategically in addressing safeguarding need.
142. The LSCB has begun to evaluate the impact of work around early help through critical friend reviews, monitoring of data and CAFs. However, more needs to be done to develop an effective framework to evaluate the impact of early help and to raise the use of the CAF by partners. This is being taken forward in current planning.
143. The evaluation of training is still at an early stage. It is over reliant on anecdotal self-report methods, which do not provide an objective measure of how well training has influenced and changed practice.
144. The LSCB needs to do more to raise awareness of safeguarding within the wider community. The use of media and of the Board's lay members role in making connections with the community is under developed. There is more to do to engage the faith sector effectively and to embed safeguarding standards in the work of the voluntary and community sector.

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.

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.

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 two additional inspectors.

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