

# North Tyneside

## Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

and

## Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board<sup>1</sup>

Inspection date: 27 February to 23 March 2017

Report published: 13 June 2017

<b>Children's services in North Tyneside are good</b>		
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		Good
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>		Good

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections 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.

## Executive summary

Services for children in North Tyneside are good. In the vast majority of cases seen by inspectors, children have benefited from high-quality social work and well-coordinated partnership working, and this has demonstrably improved their lives. There is an excellent focus on seeking the views of children to shape services and to ensure that individual targeted services meet their needs.

Strong political and senior manager leadership ensures that improving outcomes for children and young people is at the heart of North Tyneside Council. This shapes its strategic priorities and effectively influences partners in sharing their ambition and commitment to improve children's lives. Engagement and participation are a particular strength and children are not only heard, but their views are shaping and driving service improvement. Good workforce development, commissioning of services and performance monitoring contribute to delivering effective services and solid social work practice. However, actions identified from thematic and casework audits are not always specific and measurable or have timescales. At the last Ofsted inspection in 2012, safeguarding and services for children looked after were judged to be good. The quality of those services has continued to be developed and improved, and inspectors saw evidence of robust social work practice that is improving the lives of children in North Tyneside.

There is a broad and developing early help offer, which is of good quality and supports families, preventing children from needing to be referred to children's services. Significant harm is identified and responded to well. Assessments are timely and comprehensive, although in a small number of cases not always updated to reflect the changing needs of children. Planning for children is effective and driven by social workers who know children well and supported by effective operational partnership working, providing a wide range of services to support and protect children. Responses to children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing are well developed and effective. A good range of accommodation informed by a prompt assessment is provided for 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless. Awareness raising of private fostering is good, but the social work response following notification is not always prompt. The designated officer coordinates agencies well when issues are raised about professionals who may be behaving inappropriately towards children. However, the completion of investigations is not always timely.

North Tyneside Council is a highly ambitious and nurturing corporate parent for all of its children and ensures that there is an excellent range of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

Edge of care services work well to support children to stay at home. Children only become looked after when it is in their best interests, and, in these instances, the response is timely and appropriate. A good range of permanence options combined with a wide range of local accommodation, including foster carers' and children's homes, means that most children maintain their local support networks. This

promotes stability and security for children. Effective services from health, education and specialist support promote good outcomes. The caseloads of independent reviewing officers (IROs) who chair child protection conferences and children looked after reviews are high, and this impacts on their ability to monitor progress between meetings. Children and carers who met inspectors reported that they have too many changes of social worker.

Achieving permanence for children is a key priority in North Tyneside. There is strong oversight of children to ensure that children find their 'forever homes'. Although it has taken a long time to secure permanence through adoption for some children, this is due to the additional time required to find adoptive families for older children and sibling groups. Overall, adoption timeliness is improving. There is a wide range of effective post-adoption support available, including therapeutic assessments of attachment to enhance adopters' understanding of children's needs. Life story work and later life letters, however, take too long to complete and are of variable quality. Adopters who met inspectors reported that they feel extremely well supported and prepared throughout the process.

The services for care leavers are outstanding. This is because council leaders and senior managers have high aspirations for all care leavers and consistently listen to the views of young people and value their contribution. The care leavers' team has an excellent focus on working proactively with the young people. As a result, all care leavers are in touch with their workers, live in suitable and safe accommodation, take increasing responsibility for their health and have excellent support to continue their training and to find jobs. They benefit from highly effective individual support, including through their pathway plans, and many of them have benefited from apprenticeships with the council. The result is that the vast majority have the skills and knowledge that they need to become successful adults.

Despite much good work across children's services, the recording of social workers' involvement with children is inconsistent. There are variable approaches to social work recording and completion of key documentation. The quality of supervision notes is also variable and, for a small number of cases, this means that it is not always possible to evidence reflective and directive management oversight. These issues are due to an electronic client database, which is barely fit for purpose. The local authority is well aware of the issues and is procuring another system, which will become live in 2018. In the interim, it has put in additional support to address current deficits and to ensure that the problems with recording do not impact on the high quality of support that social workers provide to children and their families.

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## The local authority

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

#### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates five children's homes. Three were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements / arrangements for the protection of children was published in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was published in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

#### Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since July 2015.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services.
- The chief executive has been in post since November 2013.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since March 2014.

#### Children living in this area

- Approximately 40,460 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in North Tyneside. This is 20% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 18% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 16% (the national average is 17%)
  - in secondary schools is 12% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 5% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian/Asian British and Mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 5% (the national average is 20%)
  - in secondary schools is 4% (the national average is 16%).

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

## Child protection in this area

- At 27 February 2017, 1,319 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,462 at 31 March 2016.
- At 27 February 2017, 169 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 42 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 179 children (44 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 27 February 2017, four children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from three at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years prior to inspection, six serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted, and no serious case reviews have been completed.
- There is one serious case review ongoing at the time of the inspection.

## Children looked after in this area

- At 27 February 2017, 298 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 74 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 290 (72 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
  - 88 (or 30%) live outside the local authority area
    - 26 live in residential children's homes, of whom 16 (62%) live out of the authority area
    - none is in residential special schools
    - 223 live with foster families, of whom 69 (31%) live out of the authority area
    - 17 live with parents, of whom five (29%) live out of the authority area
    - two children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
  - there have been 19 adoptions, and 14 children are currently placed for adoption
  - 21 children became subject of special guardianship orders (SGOs)
  - 137 children ceased to be looked after, of whom three (2%) subsequently returned to be looked after
  - four young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
  - no young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

## Recommendations

1. Ensure that assessments are regularly updated to reflect the changing needs of children and that they fully consider children's identities, contingencies and research.
2. Ensure that support to children who are privately fostered is timely, managed well and effectively meets the needs of children.
3. Improve the timeliness with which designated officers complete investigations.
4. Improve the oversight of IROs of the progress of plans between child protection conferences and between children looked after reviews, and evidence this on the child's records.
5. Ensure that life story work and later life letters are of consistently good quality and completed in a timely way to ensure that children and their adopters have a clear understanding of a child's history in preparation for placement and for later life understanding.
6. Ensure that supervision for all staff is consistently of good quality because it is reflective, directive, regular and well recorded.
7. Ensure that actions identified as a result of audits are specific and measurable and have timescales.

## Summary for children and young people

- Services for children and young people in North Tyneside are good. This is because the council listens carefully to your views, you have helped to improve services and everyone is working together to make things better for children and young people.
- Sometimes when you need extra help, particularly if you do not feel safe, everyone works closely together to make sure that you and your family receive the right sort of help quickly. This means that social workers, police and teachers work well together to make sure that you are safe and well protected. It also means that families get help before problems are too big.
- Social workers provide good and helpful support to you. They write good assessments about what needs changing when they first start working with you and your families. However, they are not always good at making sure that these are updated and include all the things that have changed. Everybody needs to know when things should be done, who should do them and what should happen next if there is a problem.
- When you have to leave your family, social workers are good at making sure that you live in stable, caring foster families and in good children's homes. Managers are very good at making sure that you can live locally, near to your school and friends. When it is safe for you to return home, you and your families are helped to do so with lots of support to make it work.
- If you are being looked after by the local authority, you have plenty of help to make sure that you stay healthy, go to the doctor and dentist regularly and do well at school. If problems arise, then plans are made, which are reviewed regularly so you can continue to make good progress. You are helped to say what you think in reviews, and people listen to what you have to say.
- You have helped to improve the care leaving service, and this is now outstanding. Social workers and personal advisers develop excellent relationships with young people. They work extremely hard to make sure that care leavers feel safe and happy with their accommodation and have a pathway plan that is right for them. Everyone in the council is involved, for example by offering an apprenticeship or work experience. A high number of care leavers are attending further and higher education. Personal advisers and social workers are in touch with everyone.
- You told inspectors about a very small number of things you would like to see improve. For example, a very small number of you had changed social worker too many times. This sometimes makes you lose trust in the people trying to help you, although this has not happened very often. Finally, you told us that some of you wanted to complete your life story work, but in too many cases this has not happened. We listened to you and asked the council for these things to improve.



**The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection**

**Good**

**Summary**

Children are at the centre of the social work practice in North Tyneside. Children’s voices and opinions are the foundation of assessments and planning. Direct work with children is of good quality and undertaken by social workers who know the children they work with very well.

No children were found to be in situations of unassessed or unmanaged risk of significant harm. In the vast majority of cases, inspectors saw good-quality social work, with appropriate support and intervention resulting in reducing risk and improving outcomes for children.

An extensive range of early help services is available to support the differing needs of children and families. This is resulting in improving outcomes for many children.

Children in need receive good, timely support, ensuring that needs are met early, and risks are reduced safely, so they do not enter the child protection system unnecessarily.

Thresholds are well understood and appropriately applied. The multi-agency screening and coordination team (MASCT) deals with all contacts appropriately and promptly. When children are potentially at risk of significant harm, enquiries are swift and robust, including an effective, well-coordinated response to children who are missing or at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Assessments are timely and thorough and provide a good platform for planning and intervention to meet children’s needs and reduce risk. However, not all assessments are updated to reflect children’s changing circumstances, and written plans are not of a consistently good quality.

Multi-agency response to risk is well managed through timely information sharing in strategy meetings, conferences and core groups, and as a result actions taken are appropriate to the levels of identified risk, and statutory intervention is taken only when it is necessary.

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are well established and demonstrate a coordinated multi-agency response and shared understanding that reduces risk to children.

However, although there has been much done to improve the recognition of private fostering in North Tyneside, too many children experience delays in these arrangements being formalised. The designated officer provides a good service, ensuring that children are safeguarded. However, the investigations are not always completed in a timely manner.

## Inspection findings

8. Children who need help and protection in North Tyneside benefit from high-quality social work, robust multi-agency working and a strong focus on ensuring that their views are at the centre of all decision-making. This enables outcomes for these children to improve.
9. A well-considered early help and prevention strategy that also includes the Troubled Families work has been developed, and is informed by a thorough analysis of local need. It is clear and used by all agencies across North Tyneside. As a result, children benefit from the provision of a good range of universal, targeted and specialist services. This reduces risk and helps to reduce the need for statutory social care intervention. Feedback provided by children who met the inspectors was positive. They described enthusiastically how the support has improved school attendance, self-esteem and relationships within families. One child reported, 'I am able to contact the family partner and discuss how I'm feeling. She has supported my mum with doing volunteering and she has now got a job. She has helped my brother to improve his school attendance, and there is a good atmosphere at home.'
10. Families can access a good range of early help services, based in their own communities. These provide parenting support and targeted assistance related to substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse. Intensive support is also provided, including during evenings and at weekends, to better meet the needs of children and families. The support is being effective at tackling issues and concerns earlier and preventing crises that result in referrals to children's services.
11. The MASCT is an effective single point for all contacts with children's services. In all cases seen by inspectors, thresholds were appropriately applied. Qualified social workers make all decisions about whether referrals meet the threshold for a social work assessment. Decision-making is informed by thorough information gathering and good consideration of previous involvement with agencies. There is effective information sharing within the MASCT to ensure an appropriate response to risk. Advice and decisions are clearly recorded and reviewed by the senior social worker and are of sound quality. A large majority of contacts (97%) have a decision made about whether to progress to referral in one working day. Referrers are routinely informed of the outcomes of their referrals. Consent is sought appropriately. The out-of-hours service responds swiftly and proportionately to presenting risks. There is a robust handover and information sharing with the MASCT, and this minimises delay in follow-up and keeps children safe.
12. The presence of a detective constable and domestic abuse worker within the MASCT enables timely joint working and decision-making between the agencies and, as a consequence, families gain access to prompt support so that needs are met early and risks reduced. The domestic abuse worker provides timely advice and support to victims of domestic abuse and

undertakes short pieces of work with families, making swift referrals for ongoing therapeutic support and interventions when appropriate. The housing officer responds quickly to any housing issues and expedites searches for suitable accommodation. In the main, arrangements for step up and step down from early help to the MASCT are effectively managed to ensure timely and appropriate information sharing. However, in a very small number of cases seen by inspectors, there had been a delay when signposted to early help services. The local authority advised inspectors that it is introducing a new series of checks to improve the management oversight from the MASCT, to ensure that families receive the support that they need at the time that they need it.

13. The quality of assessments is good. They are timely and comprehensive, consider historical information, effectively identify risks and strengths and make appropriate recommendations for future action to reduce risk and meet children's needs. Views of children and family members are integrated well in the assessment process. However, in a small number of cases, assessments are not updated to reflect the changing circumstances of children.  
(Recommendation)
14. Children in need and their families receive a good range of well-coordinated services and interventions to ensure that children's needs are met effectively within their families, and positive changes are sustained. In addition to well-coordinated and regular children in need reviews, inspectors saw a range of assistance from practical support to bespoke 1:1 sessions with parents as well as social workers working closely with other professionals, such as from education, housing, health and the youth offending service to ensure that support is coordinated and leading to positive outcomes.
15. Significant harm is recognised well. Strategy meetings are thorough, timely and very well attended by an appropriate range of agencies. Coordinated multi-agency responses result in good understanding of risks and inform decision-making. Appropriate actions are taken promptly to ensure that children are safe. Decisions to progress from a child protection enquiry to an initial child protection conference (ICPT) are timely. Subsequent child protection conferences are held promptly. Effective multi-agency information sharing ensures that immediate risk is identified, assessed and managed promptly and results in children receiving proportionate interventions. Decisions to make children subject of a child protection plan are appropriate. Children are well supported to participate and contribute to their conferences either via completion of child protection consultation forms or in person, with the support of an advocate. Since April 2016 to date, 30 children aged over eight have been supported at ICPCs.
16. Child protection, core groups and child in need (CIN) reviews are regular and well attended, resulting in well-coordinated planning that protects and safeguards children. IROs chair both child protection conferences and children looked after reviews. Despite caseloads for IROs being high, 90% of initial and

99% of review child protection conferences are held on time. IROs' ability to have an overview of the progress of plans between reviews, however, is compromised by the poor recording system in North Tyneside.  
(Recommendation)

17. When children are on child protection plans, work is focused on managing and reducing risk. Evidence was seen of effective use of family group conferencing, resulting in additional support being provided by the extended family members and enabling children to remain safely with their parents. Parents are referred to appropriate intervention programmes, such as domestic violence perpetrator programmes, parenting programmes and services that provide support for families with drug- and alcohol-related problems. When parents have engaged positively, this has resulted in risk reduction and improved outcomes for children.
18. The electronic client database does not support good social work practice. Senior managers are fully aware of the issues, and the system is due to be replaced in 2018. Temporary arrangements have been put in place to attempt to strengthen the current system. However, social workers raised issues to inspectors about the additional work needed and about how the different screens needing to be completed do not help them to record ongoing work and key documentation fully. Despite these significant issues, social workers work 'around the system', and much recording is of a good quality. However, this was not consistent on all of the children's files seen by inspectors. For instance, written plans do not always evidence the high-quality work being undertaken.
19. Children who have disabilities have their needs assessed promptly and comprehensively, and, as a result, they receive packages of care and support that reflect and meet their individual needs. Individual children's cases seen by inspectors were supported to a high standard. The team of experienced childcare social workers has recently transferred to adult services as part of a 'whole life' approach to supporting disabled people and to improving the transitions between children's and adult services. It is too early to see improvements in outcomes. Potential risks have been evaluated, and a report has been produced for the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) on the potential benefits of this new approach.
20. Children are regularly visited by their social workers, who engage in age-appropriate direct work with them. Inspectors saw the use of various tools, including 'three houses, three islands' exploration and analysis of children's own drawings and writing, which enables children to share their feelings and understanding of their experiences. The child's voice is at the core of social work practice, and social workers have a sound understanding of children's needs, which leads to effective planning.
21. Individual children at risk of child sexual exploitation or missing receive timely and robust multi-agency consideration from the missing, sexual exploitation

and trafficking group (MSET). Good partnership working and coordinated information sharing mean that risks are promptly assessed and inform safety planning to reduce risk and keep children safe. Intelligence is effectively shared across the multi-agency group to inform local understanding of high-risk areas to influence disruption activities. Social workers have a good understanding of risks associated with child sexual exploitation, resulting in focused and comprehensive support packages to reduce risk.

22. All missing children receive a 'safe and well' check from the police. The appointment of a designated missing persons' worker has improved planning. In 96% of missing episodes, children were offered a return interview in a timely manner, with 19% refusing the offer. The information gathered is used effectively to inform strategy discussions, risk assessments and care planning and to further protect children.
23. Procedures for children missing education are well established and effective. The Children Missing Out on Education (CMOOE) task force focuses on absence levels of vulnerable pupils. Effective links are in place with social care, and regular half-termly meetings track and monitor individual children. Daily checks are carried out on all referrals for children missing from education. Pupils who cannot be traced are added to the lost pupil database. A range of checks continue to be made, for example to housing and health colleagues and, in exceptional circumstances, to the Border Agency, to locate missing pupils. As a result, the central register provides an accurate picture of children and young people, known to the authority, who are not attending school. At the time of the inspection, the local authority has 27 open cases of children missing education in which enquiries are ongoing.
24. Good arrangements are in place to support children who are electively home educated. The Alternative Placement Team encourages parents to register and, once this has occurred, a home visit is offered. In the majority of cases, the authority successfully registers those families who come to their notice, so they can support them, make suitable checks to ensure that children are safe and assess the quality of provision. Currently, 41 pupils are being educated at home. The Alternative Placement Team makes concerted efforts to ensure that parents are well informed about the most suitable education for their children. The team offers home visits, support, advice and guidance to parents.
25. There is a good range of services to address domestic abuse, including victim and perpetrator programmes and services for substance misuse. The Harbour and Freedom Programme provides victims with a range of support to enable them to safeguard themselves and to protect children. The risk to children of living in families with multiple needs, such as domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental ill health, is well understood and effectively managed by the MARAC and MAPPA. Operation Encompass also effectively ensures that nurseries and schools are alerted when incidents of domestic abuse occur, so that children can receive timely support.

26. Support for 16- and 17-year-old young people at risk of homelessness is strong. Social workers undertake timely and thorough assessments, and complex cases are heard at the joint housing and social care protocol panel, ensuring a holistic consideration of broader emotional, practical and educational needs. There is a good range of accommodation options, including emergency crash pads and fully supported, semi-independent and self-contained accommodation, which enables young people's differing needs to be met. Appropriate consideration is undertaken as to whether children should be looked after to ensure that their welfare is promoted. No young person has been accommodated in unsuitable accommodation, including bed and breakfast provision, in 2016–17 and this is good practice.
27. The local authority has undertaken steps to increase awareness of private fostering in North Tyneside. At the time of the inspection, there were four children identified as living under private fostering arrangements. The services provided to the children were not consistently good. In the cases seen by inspectors, a number of issues were identified, including delays in assessing and confirming arrangements. (Recommendation)
28. The management of allegations of abuse by professionals against children is robust, and this ensures that children are safeguarded. However, investigations are not always completed in a timely manner. (Recommendation)
29. The local authority and its partners have a robust joint strategy in place for children who may be at risk of radicalisation. Although there have been no referrals to the multi-agency Channel panel, an exercise was undertaken by agencies in May 2016 to gain assurance of the effectiveness of the process. Training has been provided to staff to identify and respond to risks of radicalisation and female genital mutilation. There has been one case of female genital mutilation in North Tyneside, and the judge dealing with this wrote to the local authority commenting on the sensitive and efficient way in which social workers had managed the case.

<p><b>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</b></p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Services for children looked after are good and outstanding for care leavers. Children become looked after when this is in their best interests, and edge of care services help to prevent them from becoming looked after unnecessarily. When it is required, decisions for children to become looked after are timely and appropriate. Prompt action to seek legal advice ensures that permanence for children is timely. A wide range of permanence options are available, providing children with safe and secure placements when needed.</p> <p>The health needs of children looked after are well met, and there are effective responses to support children’s emotional well-being and attachment disorders. Current educational progress for children looked after is positive, and a significant majority of pupils make expected levels of progress. The pupil premium is being used creatively to help to support the educational progress of children looked after.</p> <p>Responses to children who are missing and/or at risk of sexual exploitation are good and have resulted in improved outcomes, especially for those children living in children’s homes.</p> <p>The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is highly influential and effective in challenging professionals and politicians to ensure that services for children looked after are good and improving.</p> <p>In a few areas, the local authority needs to improve to make services for children looked after even better. Examples include IROs challenging the progress of plans for children, reducing the number of changes of social workers for children and improving timeliness of life story work.</p> <p>The local authority is committed to securing permanence through adoption and is working to improve timeliness for children waiting for a match and to ensure more consistent and timely delivery of good-quality life story work. Tenacious family finding for harder-to-place children and therapeutic post-adoption support demonstrate positive impact for children.</p> <p>Excellent, aspirational services and support mean that the vast majority of care leavers are engaged in education, training or employment, and all live in safe and supportive housing arrangements. Staff work tirelessly to help them to reach their potential. Care leavers are very regularly consulted and feel valued. This has resulted in ensuring that the service they receive is outstanding.</p>	

## Inspection findings

30. Children in North Tyneside only become looked after when it is in their best interests and, in these instances, the response is timely and appropriate. The number of children looked after at the time of the inspection was 298, a slight increase from 291 in 2015–2016, which is above the England averages but below that of statistical comparators.
31. Effective edge of care services, working closely with multi-agency professionals, including education, health, youth offending, Raising the Health and Education of Looked After Children (RHELAC) and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), provide good, targeted work to prevent children from becoming looked after and to support them when they return home. A parenting programme delivered to 13 families of children looked after was very successful and resulted in eight children returning home and staying at home.
32. Good use of the Public Law Outline (PLO) ensures that decisive action is taken when children need to be looked after. Letters before proceedings clearly set out what families need to do to support children. Family group conferencing (FGC), commissioned from a national charitable organisation, is increasingly used, so that all options are considered before children become looked after. FGC has been effective in helping children to remain with their own families and in improving relationships within families to sustain good outcomes for children.
33. The local authority has forged productive working relationships with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). Effective communication, particularly with IROs, and performance monitoring of the use of the PLO, means that children and young people benefit from efficient and timely progression through the court system. The average duration for care proceedings is 27 weeks: better than the national average of 30 weeks in 2015–16. Assessments and reports for court are detailed, and there is evidence of managerial oversight of quality.
34. When the plan is for children to return home, comprehensive assessments are undertaken to evaluate any risks, so that children are protected and supported. Children placed at home are visited regularly by social workers, and the frequency of visiting is adjusted according to risk. Oversight by managers ensures that, when appropriate, necessary action is taken to discharge care orders or escalate any concerns.
35. The local authority is achieving permanence for children in a timely way. Monitoring is also used successfully with children who are accommodated under section 20, to assure that this is the best legal option to promote their welfare and to ensure permanency. As a result, the number of care proceedings has increased and the percentage of children accommodated



under section 20 has reduced from 31% (90) in 2015–2016 to 27% (81) currently.

36. Short-term and long-term placement stability is better than that of comparator authorities. This success is maintained because there is a wide range of permanence options. SGOs and regulation 24 placements with connected persons are increasingly being used as permanence options for children, which helps them to maintain close bonds with people they know. The local authority also has five children's homes, two of which are increasingly evolving their services in response to children's needs, including 'staying close' and staff supporting the edge of care services.
37. The local authority fostering service is very responsive. The fostering strategy has clear priorities to meet the complex and changing needs of children looked after. In response to the rise in the number of older children becoming looked after, there is a focus on developing the specialist fostering scheme for teenagers. There are also a small number of mother and baby placements and foster carers who focus solely on brothers and sisters living together. Most placements for children (92%) are within 20 miles of the child's own community, and the large majority (67%) are within North Tyneside. This enables children to retain their local support networks and friends, promoting stability and security and, importantly, their feeling of identity in 'belonging'.
38. Placements for those children living out of area in excess of 20 miles are usually specially commissioned services for children who have complex needs and display challenging behaviour. In those instances seen by inspectors, there is good access to specialist health provision, education and support. However, there are sometimes delays in transferring children to local CAMHS.
39. The needs of children are prioritised well by the local authority fostering service. Foster carers value the good support from the service, which is responsive, approachable and friendly. As a result, 98 foster carers have remained with the local authority for longer than six years, and 12 in excess of 21 years. This means that children benefit from stability and consistency from committed carers. Foster carers receive a good range of flexible support and training to help them to care for children. Assessments for new foster carers are completed within timescales, and this is tracked on a daily basis. Training is efficiently managed and well organised, and there is a good monitoring system in place to track gaps in foster carers' training, which has led to a 50% increase in take up on the training offer since December 2016. Training, including access to parenting programmes, is also offered to connected persons and SGO carers. Carers value the experienced staff and quality of training provided, which enables them to provide appropriate care for children, some of whom have very complex needs.
40. Independently chaired annual reviews of foster carers are detailed and analytical and incorporate the views of children. This helps to ensure that foster carers continue to be able to meet the needs of children. Independent

unannounced supervisory visits of foster carers further strengthens oversight of foster carers and safeguards children.

41. A dedicated worker, who knows the needs of carers and children well, undertakes placement matching for children requiring a foster placement. Placement planning meetings take place in a timely way to make sure that all aspects of a child's care plan are considered within a day of placement, whenever possible. There is a clear priority given to identifying a suitable in-house match. Proposals to place brothers and sisters together or separately are addressed in children's plans. Appropriate assessments, including independently commissioned assessments, are undertaken to fully consider issues relating to age and the impact and appropriateness of different placement options for brothers and sisters.
42. Supervised contact is well supported and managed. Social care assistants are allocated to a number of families to support contact arrangements and provide consistency for children. There is good provision of contact venues available for supervised contact as well as a variety of community-based activities and facilities. Supervised contact referral forms provide all necessary information in relation to any specific issues, frequency and duration of contacts.
43. Care team meetings are an example of excellent practice. Professionals, young people and, when appropriate, family members meet on a monthly basis to ensure that the plan is being implemented and any risks are addressed. Although detailed agency reports are produced for the children looked after reviews, formal assessments are not updated on a regular basis. This means that the changing needs, circumstances and ages of children are not always fully considered. The quality of assessments in respect of court applications is variable. In a few instances, this can lead to unnecessary delays in decision-making and planning for children's futures. (Recommendation)
44. Overall, plans for children looked after are detailed, with clear actions and timescales. These are regularly updated at children looked after reviews with any changes or new actions to further progress outcomes for children. Although the good outcomes for children in North Tyneside and the support by dedicated staff who know children well are acknowledged, the quality of assessments to inform ongoing work and plans with children is not consistent.
45. Supervisory visits to children are regular, and the recording demonstrates good consideration of children's plans and children's views. However, children and carers report that, despite the more recent stability of workers and regular statutory visiting, there have been too many changes in social workers, which have resulted in some children being unable to develop long-standing, trusting relationships with social workers. Social work team structures have recently been changed to improve this situation. (Recommendation)

46. Despite a recent emphasis on life story work through training and support by the Participation Team, and some recent good examples seen of life story books, delays in progressing this work mean that some children do not always have important information about their lives, families and histories. Children, carers and IROs all expressed concerns about this and about the impact on children. (Recommendation)
47. Current educational progress for children looked after is positive, and a significant majority of pupils make expected levels of progress. Cohorts are small in most cases, which accounts for variations in annual performance in key stage 1 and key stage 2. In addition, a significant number of pupils have additional needs, and a third attend special school provision. Despite this, progress in mathematics at key stage 2 remains above the national average. Proactive interventions by virtual school staff are ensuring that those pupils at key stage 4, a high number of whom have additional needs, are on track. The pupil premium and pupil premium plus are being used creatively to help to support the educational progress of children looked after. This includes counselling and additional resources to support crisis situations.
48. The vast majority of pupils (90%) attend good or outstanding schools within North Tyneside. Attendance is well monitored, and attendance rates for children attending in-borough schools is high, at 97%. There have been no permanent exclusions for a number of years.
49. Children looked after not in receipt of full-time education are provided with a wide range of good-quality alternative provision. Two key partners provide the bulk of the service. Currently, 16 pupils looked after are accessing 25 hours of alternative provision. In very occasional circumstances, a young person might access less than 25 hours education per week, for example when they are re-integrating into mainstream provision following long-term illness, but this is very much the exception. Quality assurance arrangements are suitably rigorous, and providers submit regular quality reports on pupils' achievement and attendance. All providers are also subject to annual visits from the authority to ensure that young people are receiving good-quality education that best suits their needs.
50. Following a full-quality audit, the virtual school recognised the need to improve the quality and timeliness of personal education plans (PEPs). As a result, PEPs were redesigned two years ago, with the help of social workers, carers and young people. The resulting PEP is much simpler to complete, and most are good.
51. Good attention is paid by virtual school staff to identifying any child looked after who has concerns about bullying. A recently appointed counsellor is being used well to support any young people identified as at risk of being bullied. The CiCC Care 4 Me group is providing training to schools to improve their understanding of the specific needs of children in care. The Mind Your

Head lesson plan helps to support teachers to raise awareness of mental health issues.

52. Children looked after in North Tyneside are encouraged to access leisure facilities and are provided with free passes. A free pass is also available to any friend who wants to accompany them. The passes can be used for gyms, swimming pools and a range of classes and activities. The CiCC is also involved in organising an annual Christmas party and celebration of achievements events. Carers receive prompt information and confirmation of their delegated authority. This helps them to enable children to access any leisure activities and not to feel different from other children.
53. Children who are at risk of offending are given good, well-considered holistic support. The youth offending team works closely with education, police and health staff to look at appropriate resources and support for young offenders who have undiagnosed health needs.
54. A well-established healthcare team, most of whom are co-located with the RHELAC team, including designated paediatrician, lead nurse, school and specialist nurses, provides very good health support for children and their carers. North Tyneside demonstrates consistently strong performance across all health measures, including 100% of initial health assessments and reviews, immunisations and developmental checks and 93% of dental checks completed on time.
55. Much good work is being done in relation to supporting children's emotional well-being and attachment disorders through the RHELAC team counsellor, and the dedicated education psychologist. In addition, CAMHS provide a daily triage for all children at high risk. Other CAMHS assessments are completed within a 12-week period. As a result, the mental health and well-being services for children looked after and care leavers up to age of 18 are well coordinated, and children generally receive a prompt service.
56. The influence of the voice of children in North Tyneside is very strong and results in services for children looked after that are increasingly responsive and effective. The CiCC, comprising three different groups according to age, is highly motivated and influential. The CiCC is well supported by the local authority Participation Team. The CiCC has been proactive in developing training so that multi-agency professionals understand what it is like to be looked after. The CiCC undertakes quality assurance inspections of children's homes, assists with training and carries out assessments of foster carers and their homes.
57. The CiCC, supported by the Participation Team, is very good at providing information to children looked after. A monthly newsletter is sent out to all children looked after, including those who live out of area. This helps to ensure that children are aware of their rights and entitlements. The introduction of the Mind of My Own (MOMO) application (app) gives children

an opportunity to contact their IRO or worker to give their views, comments or complaints. Advocacy is provided for all children and young people who are or have been looked after, up to the age of 25. Advocates are tenacious in resolving issues for children and only cease their involvement once the issue has been resolved.

58. Caseloads for IROs are high. IROs have caseloads for both child protection cases and children looked after. Despite the high caseloads, children looked reviews are timely, with 99% within timescales. The vast majority of children (94%) also participate in their reviews, and more children are able to contribute to their reviews using the MOMO app. Due to the poor quality electronic client recording system, IROs struggle to have an overview of progress between reviews, and their impact and challenge are not always evident in the children's files. (Recommendation)
59. Robust responses to when children go missing and/or are at risk of child sexual exploitation have been instrumental in safeguarding children. Recent data, April 2016 to February 2017, shows that in most instances (96%) children were offered a return interview and most of the interviews (92%) were completed within 72 hours of the child returning home. The information collated from the interviews is used efficiently to inform strategy discussions, risk assessments and care planning. Evidence of the effectiveness of this work can be demonstrated in the reduction, by more than half, of children missing from in-house residential care. There has been an increase in overall missing and absent episodes in 2016–2017. However, the local authority has a clear understanding of the reasons why and has responded appropriately.

**The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good**

60. North Tyneside is committed to securing permanence through adoption, and is working to improve timeliness for all children waiting for a match with adopters. It has robust oversight of parallel planning from when children first become looked after until a permanent placement is identified, through regular tracking meetings and scrutiny of performance information.
61. Experienced workers support permanence planning and are tenacious in finding permanent homes for harder-to-place children. Successful adoptive placements have been achieved for sibling groups and older children. Recent data shows that nearly half of children adopted in the last 12 months were aged five or over. For a small number of children, adoption plans have appropriately changed in favour of other permanence options, and there is a clear rationale underpinning such decisions, based on children's views and updated assessments of need and attachments. Overall, there have been 19 children adopted in the last 12 months, which is slightly fewer than the 25 adopted in each of the previous four years. This is in line with national trends and the increased and appropriate use of SGOs as an alternative route to permanence in the local authority.
62. Recent adoption performance data evidences an improving picture of timeliness for children with an adoption plan in the last 18 months. The vast majority of children are now meeting scorecard timescales for both key indicators, and effective use of the tracker ensures that plans for permanence are closely monitored and progressed in a timely way.
63. Arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and training of adopters are effective and timely. The quality of the prospective adopter reports (PARs) is good, and clear analysis of applicants' strengths and areas for development underpin matching considerations. The completion of PARs includes a quality assurance visit, undertaken by the manager prior to approval recommendations presented to panel. Assessments for approved adopters completed in the last 12 months have all been within timescales. Adopters particularly value the access to therapeutic input for extended adoptive family members. This has helped adopters and their wider family to develop greater understanding about attachment issues and to feel more prepared to help children to settle into their new families. Adopters spoken to were very positive about the helpful and supportive service, felt well prepared throughout the process and welcomed the expertise provided.
64. Many adopters are identified for children locally, but, when this is not possible, regional and national processes are used in a timely way. Two approved adopters are currently waiting for a match, and have been linked to the national adoption register and other regional and national initiatives, ensuring

that there is good support to help them to identify a potential adoptive placement.

65. Pre-matching meetings are effective in identifying the best possible match for adopters and children. The service consistently discusses the potential for foster to adopt placements with all adopters, as part of the assessment process and has utilised such placements effectively to place a small number of children. Family finding efforts are extensive and creative, making good use of adoption activity days to identify potential families for older children and sibling groups. Family finding efforts are under way for two children with a placement order, and potential adopters have been identified for both children, including an older child for whom a national search has taken longer to identify a suitable family.
66. The adoption and fostering panel is timely and efficient and offers appropriate scrutiny and challenge to all matching decisions and approval recommendations. The chair is independent and experienced, and there is an appropriately constituted group of panel members who are knowledgeable about the needs of children for permanence, in relation to both fostering and adoption. The chair ensures that the rationale for decision-making is recorded clearly. The agency decision-maker ratifies decisions in a timely manner, ensuring that children and families are informed promptly. The panel is effective in listening to the views of children and includes representatives from the CiCC on annual panel training. This has led to children's views on improving the quality of life story work informing the work of panel, which has been taken forward by the participation team in the local authority.
67. The vast majority of adopters receive good support when children first move to their care. Therapeutic assessments of attachment enhance adopters' understanding of children's needs, including those of brothers and sisters placed together.
68. Life story work and later life letters for some children can take too long to complete and are of variable quality. The service has plans in place to ensure greater consistency, and recently has provided a rolling programme of training on life story work to social workers, which has resulted in some improvement. (Recommendation)
69. Effective post-adoption support plans are detailed. They are based on therapeutic principles and show clear actions and responsibilities, including financial support when it is required. There is a good range of support offered to adopters, utilising the adoption support fund, including Theraplay, Safebase and independently commissioned attachment training. Adopters reported to inspectors that the training is 'incredibly helpful and uplifting'. They have access to a range of support groups in the region, and effective work is undertaken with birth families to support appropriate letterbox contact. The post-adoption social worker also offers support and advice to schools and

ensures that adopted children are very well supported by school staff, in accordance with their assessed needs.



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

70. Outstanding services for care leavers mean that the vast majority of them are either in education or training or employed. Many of them have benefited from work experience with the council, and a significant number have gone on to complete apprenticeships locally. All of them live in safe and supportive housing that includes staying put with their foster carers or successfully managing their own tenancies. As a result of building open and trusting relationships with staff, care leavers make excellent progress in developing their independent living skills and taking full responsibility for their health and the choices that they make. They have also been instrumental in making improvements to the service, for example in relation to pathway plans, and these developments are helping the vast majority to make significant progress towards successful adult lives.
71. Staff and managers are extremely effective in staying in touch with young people. Workers on the care leavers' team are passionate and committed and work tirelessly in supporting young people, being persistent especially with those who are more difficult to engage. As a result, they are in touch with 100% of care leavers. Care leavers have an excellent understanding of their rights and entitlements, and their achievements are rewarded and celebrated. They have been fully engaged in developing the care leavers' pledge, and regular efforts are made by staff to further canvass their views.
72. Highly effective collaborative working with health colleagues results in care leavers being very well supported in ensuring that their health needs are identified and met. Care leavers have been fully involved in developing a health passport, which provides them with a copy of their health background. The passport also provides excellent health guidance, for example on matters such as promoting good sexual health, quitting smoking and receiving help with drug and alcohol issues. To ensure high-quality continued healthcare for care leavers, a copy of this passport is shared with their general practitioner (GP), which is excellent practice.
73. Workers assess and manage risk very well and, as a result, care leavers feel safe. Pathway planning helps to drive the work with young people. Plans are comprehensive, regularly reviewed and used as a working tool to help young people to focus on their next steps and on reducing risks.
74. North Tyneside is a very good corporate parent, and is highly aspirational for care leavers. The authority listens to them, acts on their suggestions very well and provides consistently excellent support to enable them to move successfully into adulthood. Care leavers who met inspectors were very

positive about the support that they receive from the council, the dedication of politicians and senior managers, and ways in which they are actively involved in the development of future services. As a result, participation and involvement by care leavers are very high and demonstrably impact on improvements in services.

75. Care 2 Work is an extremely successful council initiative, working across the region to help care leavers into work. High numbers of care leavers have benefited from bespoke training opportunities, for example vocational taster programmes, English and mathematics and work experience. Young people are extremely positive about the support that they receive. As one apprentice put it, 'I could never have done this without the support of the team and I probably would not have completed my education. Now I am a mother and also have a career which I love.' Apprentices are located across the whole authority. So far, a high number of young people (19) have benefited from either extended work experience, apprenticeships or traineeships within the authority.
76. Staff and managers have very high expectations for all care leavers. This helps to account for the 84% of care leavers engaged in education, training or employment. This compares favourably to 61% of care leavers nationally. When young people are not engaged, they tend to be the older, 19-plus cohort, 58% of whom are engaged in comparison to 49% nationally. This reduction in engagement post 19 has been recognised by the authority that is taking robust action. For example, a monthly not in education, employment or training (NEET) monitoring group focuses on individual cases, and there is an excellent peer mentoring programme, which is re-engaging young people and giving them a mentoring qualification.
77. There is excellent support for young people to help them to move successfully towards independence, particularly in managing everyday living tasks. The proportion of care leavers who are in suitable accommodation is extremely high at 98%. This is because innovative and effective work is being undertaken to develop and improve the housing options for care leavers in North Tyneside. The care leaving team and the strategic housing lead work very closely together to ensure that a wide range of provision is available. Twenty care leavers currently benefit from staying put arrangements.
78. Accommodation providers and other partners communicate extremely effectively, ensuring that everyone involved with care leavers is kept informed about their progress. Care leavers reported to inspectors that they feel extremely well supported and grow in confidence in relation to such things as budgeting, getting their driving licence and managing to cook for themselves. Many of them are able to achieve an additional social development qualification.
79. Excellent guidance is in place to assist young people in tenancies with external providers and in local authority tenancies. This ensures that high-quality

planning, support and preventative work are in place, to assist young people when things are not going well or if there is a potential threat of eviction. The housing advice team, community protection team and leaving care workers communicate closely and aim to work proactively with young people at all times to reduce and prevent any evictions.

80. Support for leisure activities and sporting opportunities is excellent. Care leavers have access to Ease Extra cards, which entitle them to visit any public leisure facility in the borough free of charge. They can take a friend with them also free of charge. They can use gyms and swimming pools and access a range of classes and activities during the day and in the evening. Young people spoken to by inspectors were particularly appreciative of this facility, especially of being able to take a friend. They said that it helps them to become fitter and gives them something positive to do.

<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Senior managers, leaders and politicians provide a clear vision to improve outcomes for children and young people. Core social work practice is good and means that services for children and families contribute positively to improving their daily lives. The alignment of strategic plans provides a shared sense of ownership and ambition across partnerships, with a clear drive to enhance children’s lives. Engagement and participation are highly visible in the evaluation and development of services. Consultation with parents, carers, social workers and children and young people is central to the everyday workings of the local authority, and this ensures that senior managers and leaders have a comprehensive understanding of frontline practice.</p> <p>The director’s efforts are well focused on understanding local need and demand for services, forming the basis of a local authority transformation programme to target services. The director takes an open and transparent approach to understanding frontline services and uses this to improve and strengthen social work practice. Social workers spoken to by inspectors feel highly supported and valued.</p> <p>A whole-council approach to corporate parenting ensures that this responsibility is held across the local authority and that the ‘family firm’ provides work experience and apprenticeship opportunities, and uses strong partner relationships to secure ownership of corporate parenting across services and local businesses. The corporate parenting board is highly ambitious for its children and young people and tightly monitors their progress. The CiCC is highly effective in shaping and improving local services, and in leading on regional standards that all children looked after can expect from their home authority.</p> <p>Good commissioning of services, performance monitoring and quality assurance contribute to delivering effective services and solid social work practice. Weekly performance information is circulated to all managers, allowing them to interrogate and act on identified issues. There is a significant programme of audits identifying service strengths and where practice needs improvement. Resultant action plans, however, are not always specific and measurable and with timescales. The electronic client database does not support good recording and consistent social work practice, and the local authority has improved some of its functionality prior to a new system being introduced in 2018.</p> <p>Children and carers reported to inspectors that their main concern is changes in their social workers. Increased turnover in staffing is new to North Tyneside, but the reasons are well understood by the local authority and it is taking assertive action to retain and recruit staff to ensure continued high-quality services.</p>	

## Inspection findings

81. Improving outcomes for children and young people is a clear priority across North Tyneside. The local authority has strategically aligned a number of plans with the Our North Tyneside plan. This identifies three clear priorities to ensure that children are ready for school, ready for work and life, and are safe, supported and cared for. These outcomes form the foundation of the corporate parenting plan, the children and young people's plan, and the joint health and well-being strategy. Each plan details how partners work together strategically with the single focus on improving services for children and young people, which provides a shared sense of ambition and a commitment across the council and its partners. These are translated into actions that are well coordinated and, more importantly, underpin the effective services that are delivered to children and make a difference to their lives.
82. Leaders and managers are proud and passionate about the services for children in North Tyneside. They ensure that safeguarding is firmly embedded in all council activity. Monthly leadership forums for all managers hold them to account and explore national areas of safeguarding, learning and local concerns raised by children and young people. Actions are agreed and swiftly implemented. For example, national learning led to more council staff receiving training to recognise concerns relating to child sexual exploitation.
83. Senior managers and leaders have a clarity about what is happening at the front line, through regular communication with children, carers, parents and social workers, and this has influenced decision-making. When young people raised issues about housing options, the local authority reviewed its housing stock and developed two-person supported accommodation, enabling young people to live with their friends.
84. The voice of children and young people is woven into the fabric of the local authority. Despite times of austerity, a highly effective and dedicated team has been developed, providing participation, advocacy and engagement and focusing specifically on ensuring that the voice of children is heard and taken seriously in the local authority. The CiCC is a significant strength and is successful in influencing service design, delivery and evaluation. Its influence is far reaching, not only locally but also on a regional scale. North Tyneside has led a Regional Children in Care Council Campaign, which has agreed a memorandum of understanding to ensure consistency of services for all children in care across the region.
85. Governance and accountability are clear are well established. A dedicated children, education and skills scrutiny subcommittee meets on a monthly basis and has a particular focus on children and young people. This provides a broad overview of how children and young people are helped and protected. When particular areas of concern arise, thematic subgroups are developed with a specific purpose to review current provision and provide direction.

86. There are well-established lines of accountability between the NTSCB, the DCS, chief executive and deputy chief executive, through regular scheduled meetings. Relationships are based on respectful challenge, and the NTSCB chair is a critical friend, informing and shaping service strategies and testing what this means for safeguarding children.
87. The DCS has worked for North Tyneside for eight years, two of which have included the role as director for children services, while already holding responsibility for adult social care. She has successfully forged solid partner relationships and invested heavily in understanding local demand to prevent children coming into care. The use of extensive research to identify the needs of children and families and their communities forms the basis of North Tyneside's ambitious transformation programme and the remodelling of early help services into localities with the highest need, providing a broad and developing range of support. Given the breadth of the director's responsibility, this has been assurance tested independently to ensure that she has sufficient capacity to fully meet the demands of the two roles.
88. Partnership working is built on strong and established trusting relationships, enabling the local authority to be nimble in identifying and addressing specific areas of concern. For example, a twice-yearly corporate assurance group brings together senior officers with responsibility for safeguarding, including police and health. Recently, this identified a number of children and adults engaging in the use of 'legal highs', and through the development of a 'places of concern meeting', chaired by the deputy chief executive, intelligence was shared, leading to effective, targeted disruption activity.
89. North Tyneside takes a whole-council approach to corporate parenting. Led by tenacious and dedicated senior leaders, the lead member for children and the elected mayor ensure that all areas of the council understand the challenges faced by children looked after and take responsibility as a corporate parent to improving children's lives. The local authority successfully uses its influence to ensure that partners and local businesses recognise their responsibilities and play an active role in providing care leavers with bespoke training opportunities, creating apprenticeships and work experience opportunities to enhance the offer already provided by the local authority.
90. The corporate parenting committee is ambitious for its children and receives regular reports on education, health and placements and meets regularly with the CiCC to monitor progress of care leavers and children looked after. For example, effective data analysis ensures that pupil progress is well tracked and monitored. Educational achievement for children looked after is a high priority, and there is regular scrutiny by the committee.
91. The local authority meets its sufficiency duty and ensures that children remain close and connected to their community, when possible, and an impressive 93% live within 20 miles of their homes. The local authority analysed the changing needs of children it cares for, identifying that children who have

more complex needs entering care are older, and this led to the development of specialist foster placements. Effective regional consortium relationships enable commissioners to actively manage the children's placement market to achieve the best outcomes. The alignment of children, adults and public health commissioning in the same directorate provides efficiency of effort and shared strategic priorities. The commissioning cycle is well embedded within the strategic planning framework, and, because the prevalence of need is well understood through the joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA), this ensures that a sufficient range of provision is available to meet local need.

92. The director is committed to improving social work and has taken an open and transparent approach to understanding and strengthening frontline practice, through commissioning a number of external and independent reviews. This includes peer reviews, independent assessors, external audit and targeted consultation, to work alongside staff to identify what good looks like. More recently, additional senior management capacity has been created to focus on improving the quality of its services. It has been five years since the last Ofsted inspection of children's services, and this judged services for help and protection and children looked after to be good. The quality of the support and outcomes achieved by children continues to be of a high standard because the local authority has continued to build on the solid foundations of good practice that were identified at the last inspection in 2012.
93. An extensive suite of information, tailored to meet the needs of its audience, monitors performance at all levels. Thematic audits and the recent introduction of systematic case reviews completed by managers have effectively identified key themes for improvement, the learning from which is disseminated through regular learning forums and team meetings and is impacting on improving practice, including assessments, strengthening the voice of children, and better care planning. However, subsequent action plans are not always specific, measurable or with timescales. (Recommendation)
94. The current electronic client database does not facilitate good recording, management oversight of practice, or quality assurance by IROs. The local authority has commissioned a new electronic system, which is being introduced in 2018. Meanwhile, it has been working on improving the current system's functionality, utilising a number of short-term measures. Although the system is acknowledged to be poor and makes recording and retrieval of performance information difficult for social workers, managers and IROs, inspectors did not find that this had a direct negative impact on the outcomes for children.
95. Social workers and managers told inspectors that management oversight is strong and co-location of all managers alongside their teams facilitates regular communication. However, due to the deficiencies in the electronic client database, this is not evident in all children's records. Regardless of the longer-term solutions identified, recorded oversight of practice and supervision require improvement. Although all social workers receive regular supervision,

this is not recorded in a consistent way. Where this is weaker, the recorded supervision does not demonstrate professional challenge, clarity and direction, and, where actions are agreed, no timescales are given, resulting in a lack of progress against tasks. (Recommendation)

96. Children spoken to by inspectors reported that they are concerned about changes in social workers and that this impacts on their ability to form stable relationships. Historically, North Tyneside has had a stable workforce. However, there has been a recent increase in staff turnover, due to increased wages and benefits being paid elsewhere in the region. Agency staff are providing temporary cover: this has increased from 4% in 2015–16 to 11% at the time of the inspection. The local authority has swiftly responded, offering staff a market supplement as part of their recruitment and retention package in the short term, while a longer-term competitive remuneration package is being agreed. The impact of the increased use of agency staff is recognised and action is taken, including utilising the agency staff in the main in short-term teams, ensuring effective case handover arrangements, good quality staff induction and training opportunities. All managers are permanent members of staff.
97. There is good investment in developing a culture for good social work to flourish, with a strong emphasis on continuing professional development leading to solid social work practice. This includes good levels of support for newly qualified social workers, practice teacher training, leadership development programmes, monthly 'learning forums' and an annual 'pride of practice' event, and improved support and mentoring provided by experienced senior practitioners based within social work teams. Engagement in frontline graduate programmes and step up to social work have successfully led to employment. The local authority has decided to introduce a model of social work practice and, at the time of the inspection, all staff and managers were receiving the relevant training to support the implementation of that chosen model of practice. The authority has also successfully addressed issues of high caseloads. These are regularly reviewed and monitored, and social workers told inspectors that these are now manageable.
98. Social workers and managers spoken to by inspectors were highly positive about their experiences of working in North Tyneside, and the director places high importance on ensuring that staff are well supported and feel valued. Social workers and managers told inspectors that North Tyneside promotes a nurturing, personable culture, with visible and supportive management at all levels of the service, which enables social workers to deliver good, solid social work practice that benefits children in this authority.



## The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

**The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good**

### Executive summary

The North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) is an efficient and reflective Board, meeting its statutory requirements, and effectively coordinating and assuring itself of the quality of multi-agency safeguarding work.

Governance arrangements are strong, and constructive working relationships between senior partnership managers ensure multi-agency ownership and prioritisation of safeguarding.

The chair of the NTSCB is central in developing a culture of openness and challenge, along with the business manager, who has ensured that efficient board processes are in place to support effective board functioning.

Focused multi-agency performance information, audit activity and specific reports mean that the Board is appropriately sighted on all areas for which it has responsibility, and this supports the effective prioritisation of board activity.

There is positive identification and dissemination of learning, and a wide-ranging flexible training programme is linked to board priorities. However, clear actions with timescales, including ways in which the impact of learning will be evaluated, are not consistently in place to further support improvements in frontline practice.

The voice of children and young people is evident in discrete areas of work, but does not sufficiently inform wider board activity and developments.

The Board is influential in multi-agency service planning, through rigorous scrutiny of plans and evaluation of practice. This ensures that safeguarding practice is not compromised and the implementation of strategic developments is effectively supported. The annual report 2015–2016 comprehensively describes services. However, further improvements could be made in the Board's evaluation of their effectiveness.

## Recommendations

99. Ensure that the outcomes of all learning activities are supported by clear actions with timescales, including ways in which the impact of the activity will be evaluated.
100. Ensure that the voice of children and young people effectively informs wider board activity and developments.
101. Ensure that the annual report rigorously and succinctly reflects the evaluation and effectiveness of safeguarding services in North Tyneside.

## Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

102. The NTSCB has made clear and continuing improvements since the current chair came into post in April 2014, and effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the Board fulfils its statutory functions.
103. Strong governance arrangements, NTSCB membership of key strategic boards and constructive working relationships between senior partnership managers ensure that there is effective prioritisation, coordination and multi-agency ownership of safeguarding work in North Tyneside.
104. The independent chair of the NTSCB has been instrumental in steering the board developments, setting a culture of openness and challenge and influencing senior management engagement with the safeguarding agenda. The chair is appropriately held to account by the deputy chief executive, through regular meetings, which also include the DCS. The lead member is regularly briefed to ensure that he is sighted on key board issues. The local authority commitment to the work of the NTSCB is further evidenced by additional funding for a part-time business support post, which has contributed to increased efficiency of the Board.
105. The NTSCB is constituted in line with statutory requirements. Development work by the Board and preparation and support for individual board members have ensured effective multi-agency ownership of and contributions to board activity, including by lay members. The Board has clear priorities, supported by a detailed business plan. The voice of children and young people is evident in discrete work areas, but does not sufficiently inform wider board activity and developments. (Recommendation)
106. The Board is well managed and operates very efficiently, with limited direct resources. Sub-groups of the Board are chaired by partnership managers of sufficient seniority and board processes, including timely circulation of good-

quality reports and clear work plans, and coordination of the sub-groups supports effective board functioning.

107. The Board has appropriate oversight of all practice areas for which it has responsibility. Multi-agency performance management data, including trends and comparator information, supports a clear overview of key areas and identification of where more detailed or qualitative assurance is required.
108. Audit activity gives a qualitative view of frontline work and enables practice themes to be identified. Recommendations arising from the audits are not sufficiently focused and do not have clear timescales to support more timely practice improvement. The audit programme is planned, reflecting areas of board priorities. Multi-agency audits are effectively supplemented by single-agency audit activity as part of the quality assurance for the Board. Some areas of work have also been subject to re-audit, to evaluate impact and progress. (Recommendation)
109. The Board has been effective in increasing the coverage of section 11 and section 175 audits to assure partners about the quality of wider agency safeguarding practice across the partnership. The most recent audits have been further evaluated by an external provider who has been commissioned to evaluate and lead a planned challenge event.
110. Clear reports to the Board on specific work areas, supported by board manager quality assurance, underpin effective oversight and challenge. The Board has been sighted and influential in a number of practice areas and in structural changes within agencies that impact on safeguarding practice. Examples include the improvements required for children who are privately fostered and the structural changes for children who have disabilities, prior to the service being moved to adult services to implement a whole-life approach, and ways in which robust safeguarding arrangements would continue. Another example is the plans to move health visiting and school nursing to the local authority, which have been subject to rigorous board scrutiny to ensure that safeguarding capacity and practice are not compromised. The Board's oversight of early help has also ensured that any practice deficits identified by audits have been directly addressed by management planning.
111. Effective processes are in place to identify cases from which there may be learning, and information gathering and decision-making in relation to SCRs are timely and in line with national guidance. Cases are brought to the relevant sub-group for consideration by a range of agencies. There have not been any recent SCRs published. However, the NTSCB is contributing to a significant case review, following a serious incident occurring to a Scottish child placed in North Tyneside. The Board has undertaken learning reviews to identify where practice can be further improved. Learning is effectively disseminated through a variety of methods, and the Board has ensured that learning from previous reviews and local and national SCRs are embedded in ongoing training.

112. The North of Tyne child death overview panel (CDOP) is a collaboration between North Tyneside, Newcastle and Northumberland LSCBs. It benefits from an independent chair and maximises available information and data to identify and act on areas for learning and development. Examples of positive impact include a contribution to a reduction in maternal smoking rates following targeted intervention, improving consent for child health immunisations and increasing awareness of safe sleeping. The CDOP demonstrates a learning approach to improving its function and effectiveness, and there is evidence of challenge from the Board and chair to support this. The annual report is clear and accessible.
113. The NTSCB policies and procedures, including practice guidance, are appropriate and clear, cover key areas of responsibility and are updated in a timely way.
114. The Board has been instrumental in providing support and challenge to developing and evaluating effective partnership responses to children at risk of child sexual exploitation and those who go missing. The oversight of the work is undertaken jointly with the Safeguarding Adults Board. There has been clear coordination between the sub-groups in undertaking audits and reviews, providing and refining relevant training and evaluating and evidencing direct improvements in frontline practice. The voice of young people has been central in developing more effective and timely responses when they go missing.
115. Effective induction and support have ensured the development and maintenance of an extensive pool of trainers to deliver a wide-ranging and well-regarded NTSCB training programme. Training is delivered in line with board priorities, and a range of methods support flexibility in the timeliness and targeting of delivery. NTSCB training is effectively overseen by an experienced workforce leader who also leads local authority training. Methods of evaluation continue to evolve, with electronic methods used to provide feedback at key points after the training to assess implementation and impact.
116. The annual report for 2015–16 describes key areas of safeguarding activity, but does not analyse the effectiveness of this with sufficient clarity. The report also has much content on the challenges for improving board effectiveness, but the overall improvements evident in board functioning and oversight in the last year should support a more succinct and evaluative annual report for 2016–17. (Recommendation)

## **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 four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and three additional inspectors.

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