

# Inspection of Sunderland City Council local authority children's services

**Inspection dates:** 27 to 31 January 2025

**Lead inspector:** Louise Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Since the last ILACS judgement inspection in 2021, senior leaders in Sunderland, where the delivery of children's services statutory functions have been delegated to Together for Children (TfC), have not only sustained the outstanding practice and leadership seen at the last inspection, but they have also been relentless in driving further progress and improvements. This is bringing about profound and positive changes for children, families and carers. The workforce is motivated and inspired by leaders and managers to continually improve their practice and children's outcomes.

Children receive highly effective and consistent help, support, protection and care. The quality of assessment and plans, and the identification and responses of children experiencing neglect, have all been strengthened since the last inspection. Targeted early help provides a highly effective range of innovative multi-agency support to families and children across the age spectrum, positively transforming the circumstances and outcomes of many children. A well-embedded practice model, centred around family network meetings, is used extensively across all early help and

statutory interventions, offering vital emotional and practical help to children. This is enabling more children to safely live within their families.

### **What needs to improve?<sup>1</sup>**

- The uptake of return home interviews and how the information from these informs actions to mitigate risks. (Outcome three)
- Risk assessments in respect of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children establishing contact with extended family members across the country. (Outcome three)
- The workloads of PAs in the Next Steps service. (Enabler two)

### **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: outstanding**

1. Children and their families receive a very strong early help offer in Sunderland. The early help offer is well supported by five family hubs, which are helping to deliver integrated early help to local communities through a universal and targeted offer for families. Workers are skilled at quickly establishing trusting relationships with children and their families. This strong emphasis is helping to create the conditions for realistic change. Early help assessments are sharp, focused and targeted. 'My Family' plans are inclusive and devised, if appropriate, with children, with parents and involved agencies. This fosters ownership and shared accountability of risks and need. Work in this service is highly effective, and children's lives are improving as a result.
2. The strong and highly innovative approach to early support and prevention is underpinned by the recently refreshed early help and neglect strategies. Extremely proactive partnership working from the family hubs with partner agencies is helping to address food poverty through holiday and food activities, which are co-designed with children and parents and an 'opt out' approach to accessing free school meals for children planned across the city. Community police officers work alongside the early help targeted youth service and the prevention youth offending service. This is supporting earlier identification of those children at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour and at risk of exploitation. Leaders have significantly invested in the early help workforce, supporting members of staff to gain diplomas in systemic family practice and early help advanced practitioner qualifications. This is equipping workers to confidently engage with families to bring about sustainable change for children.
3. Responses to concerns about children are swift, thorough and made by experienced and skilled social workers in the Initial Contact & Referral Team (ICRT). Decisions are underpinned by clear analysis of what information is

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<sup>1</sup> The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

already held, the contribution of partner agencies and the views of parents and carers. This results in proportionate next steps and families receiving the right level of support, by the right worker, at the time that they need it. Consent to gather more information from partner agencies is dispensed with only when necessary. Contacts from partner agencies are timely and consistently of good quality.

4. When risks and concerns about children do not meet the threshold for statutory services, contacts are closed or stepped down appropriately. Conversely, when risks or worries increase, swift action is taken to step up to statutory interventions. A collaborative ethos and seamless practice mean that early help and social workers often jointly support families through the transition of 'stepping up to or down from' statutory interventions. This means that children and families do not experience abrupt changes in professional relationships when their needs change.
5. Multi-agency collaboration is central to the success of the ICRT. The growing virtual and physical co-location of agencies enhances both professional curiosity and information-sharing between partners. Differences in risk assessment between agencies are examined and understood in huddle meetings, leading to a better analysis of risk and decisions about next steps.
6. Domestic abuse referrals are screened together with the police, enabling social workers to make risk-informed decisions to keep children safer. A small number of responses to domestic abuse feature repeated assessments and planning episodes, sometimes over short periods. However, senior leaders identified through their performance data analysis and audit work that this area of practice needed improving. Action is being taken to address this. Inspectors did not find any detriment to children.
7. Out of hours services responses are detailed and very thorough. Handover to daytime teams is effective, with records providing receiving workers with a clear understanding of the support and interventions provided and next steps required.
8. Management oversight and case supervision are clearly documented on children's records at key decision-making points. Clear rationales for next steps and continuing direct work are recorded by knowledgeable early help and social work managers.
9. Decisions to initiate child protection strategy meetings are well informed and timely. Relevant information is shared, and the people who will be part of progressing plans for children are involved in decision-making and safety planning from the outset. Child protection enquiries are thorough and address the concerns and actions from strategy meetings alongside any emerging worries.

10. Timely and holistic assessments of children's needs demonstrate a thorough understanding of children's histories and exploration of presenting concerns. Social workers achieve this through showing real interest and authenticity in their approaches to working with children and their families. Assessments include the voices of children. As a result, children in need and those in need of protection have clear detailed plans that set out each step of the intervention and support they will receive. Progress is tightly monitored through regular multi-agency reviews. Decisions to end children's plans are informed by clear and cogent multi-agency evaluations, and parental engagement, wherever possible.
11. Child protection conferences are well attended by partner agencies and parents. This means that information-sharing and planning are done with individuals who know the children from the outset. Conferences are well chaired by experienced social workers using TfC's chosen practice model, highlighting family strengths alongside any concerns, and using non-blaming language. This is helping parents to engage fully in discussions. Clear and comprehensive multi-agency information and assessments provide a sound platform from which to consider the impact of significant harm to children. Regular core groups are attended by parents and involved agencies. They carefully evaluate levels of risk and need and the progress of interventions and support.
12. Senior leaders are carefully testing out the innovative use of AI tools to support practice with families. Pilot programmes are running in a small number of practice areas such as in some family meetings and in supervision sessions. There are tight safeguards in place to ensure consent and data security are addressed. Early indications from the pilots are showing the positive impact of reduced administrative burdens on the workforce, which is releasing more time to be spent directly with children and families.
13. Children experiencing neglectful care at home are helped through timely interventions. Child protection and pre-proceedings Public Law Outline processes are initiated when their circumstances fail to improve or worsen. Robust senior manager oversight minimises any drift and delay. This is an improvement since the last focused visit, which identified that neglect was not being identified early enough for some children.
14. Leaders recognise the increasing diversity of the communities they are supporting. The recruitment of a bespoke equality, diversity and inclusion worker is beginning to have a demonstrative impact on developing a more culturally curious workforce with a strong commitment to understanding the different cultures and experiences of children and their families. This is evident in the direct work and assessment work that have been documented on children's records. When working with families from global majority ethnic backgrounds or overseas, workers are proactive in ensuring that work is completed with interpreters and that key documents are translated when necessary.

15. Children who are missing from education, or who are missing out on education, are tracked closely by senior leaders. Staff know and talk confidently about this group of children, and there is a determination to get pupils back into the most appropriate provision and re-engage with education where possible. When parents electively home educate their children (EHE), there are clear processes in place to safeguard children. Schools talk about this process confidently, and they speak positively about the support they receive from the EHE team. The voice of the child is heard at the initial meeting with parents before children are removed from school roll. Leaders have plans in place to strengthen mechanisms for gaining children's views throughout the annual review period.
16. When children are at risk of harm outside the home, social workers are very skilled at assessing children and young people's safety and deciding how to protect them. They carry out highly effective work alongside agency partners. Children who were missing from home and have been found, or have returned from being missing, are offered a return home interview (RHI) by early help prevention workers. However, attempts to engage children in RHIs are not sufficiently tenacious. Consequently, some children are not engaged as well as they could be, and this means that some children's plans are not informed by all the factors that need addressing in order to prevent them from going missing again.
17. Children aged 16 and 17 years who present as homeless receive a swift response. Children are informed of their rights to become cared for children. Workers undertake direct work with family members to rebuild relationships to facilitate a return home when this is the right thing for individual children. Where they are unable to return home, appropriate accommodation and ongoing support is secured.
18. Disabled children receive highly effective support from a very enthusiastic and committed team of social workers and child and family workers. Assessments and reassessments are proportionate to need, and the needs of parents and brothers and sisters are considered alongside the needs of the child. Workers are creative in developing bespoke plans to support families with disabled children outside of 'traditional' services. When safeguarding concerns are identified, child protection processes are swiftly engaged.
19. Young carers are identified as part of disabled children's assessments and wider assessments when children are identified as carers for parents who have mental and physical health needs. They are provided with a range of support as children in need in addition to specific support from a commissioned young carers service.
20. The designated officer provides an effective response when concerns are raised in respect of adults who work with children. New referrals into the service are triaged promptly to ensure that any immediate risk to children is identified and managed. Plans and investigations are kept under regular review to track progress and ensure timely completion of actions.

21. When children are privately fostered, these arrangements are recognised by social workers and partner agencies. Assessments and extensive checks are made in a timely manner. These assessments are thorough, and children's wishes and views about their care arrangements are considered along with the support needed by carers and children. Where it is possible, children are encouraged and supported by workers to rebuild and maintain positive relationships with parents and other family members.

## **The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding**

22. When children are no longer able to live safely at home, social workers make every effort to find ways for children and young people to remain living with their families, whenever it is safe for them to do so. When this is not possible, well-coordinated and carefully planned work supports children to enter care. Relational practice is at the heart of this assessment and planning work. Decisions for children to enter residential or foster care are made only after exploring family members and wider networks first. These significant decisions in children's lives are made based on thorough assessments of risk and include the appropriate senior management oversight and scrutiny.
23. Most cared for children live in homes where they are thriving. Children who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe and cared for where they live. While Sunderland is not immune to the challenges of placement sufficiency, senior leaders show an unstinting commitment through innovative solutions to keep children living close to home. Children are kept close, where possible, but some are placed further afield because this breaks and disrupts associations which have placed children at risk. Children are visited in line with statutory requirements but more frequently if they need this. Children living outside of Sunderland receive the same level of support from their social workers as those living in Sunderland.
24. Disabled children in care receive high-quality, bespoke care and consideration from trained staff who provide for their individual needs. Support is provided to children to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. Children and their families benefit from a range of support packages, including a comprehensive short breaks offer.
25. A very small number of children live in unregistered homes. This is always a last resort when other options have been thoroughly considered and exhausted. When this does happen, this is for the shortest of time while searches for registered homes continue. Senior leaders have strong oversight of these arrangements and seek regular assurances from managers about children's safety and the quality of care they receive. Social workers undertake increased visits to children. They undertake robust additional checks on the provider, the property and the staff to ensure that children are being safeguarded.
26. Securing permanence for cared for children is a significant strength in Sunderland. Achieving safe and stable homes for children is prioritised by

leaders and managers and is at the core of social work activity with cared for children. Feedback from the judiciary and CAFCASS about the quality-of-care applications and planning is very positive. Thorough assessments of kinship arrangements ensure that children live in safe and loving homes within their family network whenever possible. Exceptionally strong life-story work completed by social workers is focused and child centred. It is delivered at a pace suited to the individual needs of children. It helps them to understand their experiences and history and the decisions made about them and for them.

27. Securing permanence for children through special guardianship is a real strength in Sunderland. Comprehensive, therapeutic and personalised training plans for kinship carers support them in responding to the needs of cared for children. Financial support provided for kinship carers is in line with fostering allowances paid to mainstream carers. Individualised Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support plans are completed for all children and families when SGO is being considered. Leaders are not afraid of taking decisive steps for children to keep brothers and sisters together. Examples seen included pausing the plan for a child to become matched until arrangements for his sibling were agreed and moving whole families to larger properties to enable SGO applications to progress.
28. Excellent in-house clinical psychologist oversight and guidance provided for kinship and foster carers is further enhancing the quality of care. This is leading to positive outcomes and improved experiences for children.
29. Strong oversight from senior leaders and the independent review service prevents drift and delay in securing permanence for children. Plans for cared for children are regularly reviewed. Most cared for children participate in their cared for reviews through discussions with their worker, their independent reviewing officer, and the use of digital engagement tools. When appropriate, parents and wider family members are encouraged to participate in children's reviews. Children's views are listened to and respected. Huge importance is given to maintaining children's identity and preserving family networks to keep children connected to those they know and love.
30. The majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive a sensitive assessment of their needs. There is a strong recognition of the perilous journeys they have experienced. Religious and cultural needs alongside legal advice for their asylum status are all given high priority. However, risk assessments completed when unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are connecting with extended family members in other parts of the country are not always thoroughly undertaken and recorded. While police checks are undertaken, some children's records do not consistently demonstrate whether any other checks are made in order to ensure that this is a safe arrangement, for example contact with other local authorities.
31. There is a very strong fostering ethos in Sunderland. TfC is the lead for the 'Foster with Northeast' collaborative partnership, which brings together 12 local

authorities to strengthen foster carer recruitment efforts. Foster carers benefit from progressive training programs, structured support networks, and experienced and committed supervising social workers. Several support initiatives and dedicated hubs provide invaluable support, offering a range of social events and group events for children and carers. These networks provide a strong sense of community, ensuring both emotional and practical support. Clinical oversight and guidance from an experienced clinical psychologist further enhance the quality of care children receive. These combined efforts ensure that fostering remains strong, leading to positive experiences and improved outcomes for children.

32. Strong partnerships exist between the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA: Adopt Coast to Coast) and the local authority. This collaboration ensures early oversight of children who may require adoption through an early notification process, allowing time for prospective adopters to be considered and minimizing delays for children. Adopters greatly value the training and guidance provided during the assessment process, feeling well prepared for their journey. Post-order support is easily accessible, and adopters have expressed appreciation for the range of resources. The agency decision-maker maintains an excellent working relationship with the RAA, playing an essential role in developing and enhancing services for children, birth parents and adoptive families. These combined efforts ensure that children achieve timely permanence through adoption, and families receive the best possible support throughout their adoption journey.
33. When plans for children to return home are considered, robust assessments determine whether progress and improvements can be realistically maintained. Strong efforts to engage and empower members of the wider family through the family network meetings effectively support the success of rehabilitation plans, creating opportunities for safe reunification with parents where possible.
34. There is a real emphasis in Sunderland on engagement with children and young people. Social workers know their cared for children exceptionally well and nurture trusting and warm relationships with them as a foundation for supporting them through their care experience and beyond. Children are encouraged at their own pace to share their views on the support that would make a difference in their lives.
35. Social workers ensure that children are helped to understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities, including how to give feedback, request an advocate and how to make a complaint. The Mind of My Own app is widely used by children and is available in many languages. Cared for children in Sunderland have opportunities to have their voices heard and influence practice and service improvements through their children in care councils; a Mini Change Council for younger cared for children, a Midi Change Council for older cared for children and one for care-experienced young people. Confident Change Council members deliver workshops to the workforce, foster carers, councillors and Sunderland University, and are involved in the recruitment of



senior leaders. Older cared for children are being supported to take increasing control of their lives, alongside authoritative decision-making by social workers. As a result, children receive help that makes a tangible positive difference to their journey into young adulthood.

36. Children in care are encouraged to attend and engage in a range of hobbies and leisure activities, encouraging them to keep healthy and make new friends. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated at all levels of the council, and social workers demonstrate their pride in children's talents, resilience, courage and tenacity.
37. The restructure of the virtual school (VS) has enabled it to have improved oversight of cared for children alongside their broader responsibilities to vulnerable children. There is a wealth of training on offer to support schools and carers. This offer is the same for those schools in Sunderland and outside of the area. Schools speak positively about this offer and the positive impact on their practice. This strong virtual school works closely with schools, carers and social workers to ensure that strategies to reduce absence are in place. When children's educational needs are not met in their school, the VS, social workers and carers advocate strongly for more suitable provision that helps children to flourish.
38. Children's health and well-being is very well supported. Long waiting times for Children and Young People's Service intervention is mitigated by the in-house psychologist interventions. This is helping children through trauma-informed interventions and 'emotional repair' work. Support and advice are provided to social workers and carers to manage the impact of trauma and stabilise care arrangements. The impact of the work done by the speech and language therapy worker is very impressive. They are engaging with social workers, foster carers and directly with children and families to support understanding and communication for children and young people. Work focuses on providing children with the communication skills they need to be included in social settings, make friendships and contribute in meetings about them, giving a real voice to children who would otherwise have been unheard. This is making such a significant and long-lasting difference to children's lives. They are also providing children, workers and carers with the awareness and understanding that behaviour is a powerful form of communication.

### **The experiences and progress of care leavers: good**

39. Services provided for care-experienced young people in Sunderland are very strong. Social workers and personal advisers (PAs) deliver consistently good practice despite high demand and workloads. The practice model in place is well embedded and effective, with strong relational practice with young people. Leaders have accurately assessed the quality of practice and also recognise areas to strengthen further, such as increasing the opportunities for 18- to 21-year-olds to engage in education, employment, or training and

improving the accommodation offer. They are ambitious for the future of young people and have plans to address these issues.

40. Social workers in the Next Steps Team create appropriate, holistic plans in good time before children leave care. As a result, care-experienced young people transition to their Next Steps PA with a clear and comprehensive pathway plan which identifies their needs and how they will be met. However, the workload of PAs means that many children do not get to meet or build a relationship with their PA before leaving care.
41. PAs are diligent and tenacious in getting to know care-experienced young people once allocated. PAs see young people regularly, in accordance with their needs, including proactive visits to young people in custody. Care leavers in custody are spoken about with empathy, kindness and care. They are visited regularly, their plans are reviewed, and their PAs act as strong advocates for them. Care-experienced young people who are parents are very well supported by their PAs and the wider Next Steps service.
42. Relationships are built through regular face-to-face visits and virtual contacts, ensuring that PAs have an up-to-date understanding of young people's well-being and circumstances. PAs are passionate about the young people they support and show a detailed understanding of their lived experiences. They speak about them with warmth and care, and they go the extra mile to ensure that young people know that they are cared for and cared about. Consequently, there is a strong culture where young people want to stay in contact with their PA or return to the service, if they need to, after they turn 21.
43. Young people are supported by the same PAs consistently in order to build and maintain important relationships with people who are important to them. PAs are proactive in their efforts to help young people re-establish relationships, if safe and appropriate, with estranged parents and relatives, or to help them navigate relationships with parents or carers with whom they have a difficult or complex relationship.
44. Care-experienced young people of all ages attend and enjoy an extensive range of inclusive activities and social outings arranged by the care leavers group. This is a co-developed group between the activities' worker and care leavers, enabling them to develop relationships, skills and opportunities to reduce isolation. PAs ensure that care-experienced young people have access to the key documents they need, such as passport, birth certificate and health information. They are supported to access their social care records if they wish, to better understand their journey through care. As a result, young people are very well supported to take their first steps into adulthood.
45. The emotional and mental health needs of care-experienced young people are a clear priority for PAs. They are encouraged and supported to access primary health care, and PAs refer to specialist support when needed. PAs are strong advocates for young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties, and

free gym membership from the local offer encourages young people to focus on their physical health.

46. The local offer for care-experienced young people provides a wide range of allowances and support that helps young people on their journey towards independence. PAs are clear about young people's rights and entitlements, and young people accessing the offer, whether they live in Sunderland or out of the area.
47. PAs ensure that comprehensive support is provided to unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers. PAs are effective in recognising the cultural and religious needs of this group of young people and understand their histories well. Interpreters are used whenever needed, ensuring that young people can contribute to their plans and understand the support that is available to them. PAs support young people to access legal advice in relation to their claims for asylum and ensure that they live in accommodation which meets their needs. Workers are alive to potential risks they may face in the community, such as racism or other forms of discrimination.
48. PAs are well attuned to indicators of risk in the lives of care-experienced young people and play an integral role in supporting responses to enhance their safety. Those at risk of exploitation are identified early and PAs work effectively with the Missing Coordinator to develop safety and disruption plans promptly.
49. Pathway plans are aspirational and achievable for care-experienced young people. They are co-created and written from the young person's perspective and in their own words. They capture interests and hobbies, identify health needs and support young people to engage in education or employment. Plans are regularly reviewed and updated. As a result, young people invest in their plans and the support that their PA can provide for them to achieve their goals.
50. Young people leaving care are supported to understand the broad range of housing options available to them and are supported to gain the necessary skills to move into independence, both practical and emotional. Skilled and knowledgeable workers help young people to realistically consider the most suitable accommodation at the right time for them. PAs ensure that they stay in touch with young people, and others around them, and 'catch them before they fall'.
51. Most young people live in suitable accommodation, and young people we met expressed satisfaction with their accommodation and the areas of the city they are situated in, particularly when they are close to family or friends. A small number of care-experienced young people were living in accommodation that was damp and in poor state of repair. Where this is the case, PAs advocate strenuously on behalf of young people to move to better accommodation.
52. Care-experienced young people were very positive in their conversations with inspectors about the support they receive from PAs. They spoke about the

range of activities they can access, and that support is helping them to be prepared for independence. This is helping them feel valued and important, and they spoke of the support being like a 'family' around them.

## **The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding**

53. Senior leaders have continued to deliver their responsibilities to children and their families exceptionally well. They have also continually reflected, learned more about their service and improved practice and children's outcomes and experiences further since the last inspection.
54. This is commendable against the backdrop of significant senior leadership changes in the past year. There has been a new CEO of TfC, a director of children's social care and a director for education appointed. The new senior leadership team has continued to build on the solid foundation left by the previous senior leaders. These internal appointments have enabled the new post holders to use their own credibility and influence effectively in order to continue to sustain the organisational culture and further improve practice.
55. This stable and experienced senior leadership team shares a vision and commitment to support and protect children, young people and care leavers, and to provide high-quality services to help them grow up and live in safe and stable homes. The work senior leaders are doing to increase the availability of local homes for local children is impressive, as is their strong focus on enabling children to achieve timely permanence, either within kinship arrangements, fostering or adoption.
56. Partnership arrangements are very strong across all agencies. They share a joint commitment to deliver effective support to children, young people and families when they need it.
57. What has been seen consistently throughout this inspection, across all service areas, is the unstinting focus on doing what is right for children. When there appears to be intractable barriers to meeting children's needs, such as placements for children with complex needs, or barriers to services for children and their families, senior leaders are creative and innovative, for example funding a clinical psychologist to mitigate the impact of the significant wait for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, and the joint funding of a speech and language therapy professional with the Integrated Care Board. Both initiatives are significantly improving the lives of children in Sunderland.
58. Senior leaders are active sector-led improvement partners in the region. They have had trailblazer and pilot site status in respect of family networks and the fostering hub, demonstrating their relentless focus on improving children's outcomes regionally and nationally. There has been significant investment in locality family hub development, which is bringing services together for all communities across the five geographical areas of the city. This is improving

families' access to professional help and services where they live. A well-embedded practice model places a real emphasis on keeping children connected to their family networks when it is safe to do so. This has put relationships at the heart of family support and social care practice.

59. The leadership team has the confidence and backing of a committed council chief executive officer, strong political support from council members, from the chair of the TfC Board, and from the wider partnership.
60. The self-evaluation senior leaders provided at the beginning of the inspection is an accurate reflection of what inspectors found. While inspectors found a small number of areas for improvement, senior leaders were already aware of these and have meaningful and active plans in place to address a small number of shortfalls.
61. The members of the senior leadership team know the quality of services very well. A wide range of quality assurance activities helps leaders understand the impact of their services in helping to deliver better outcomes for children and their families. A strong emphasis is placed on learning from feedback from children, their families and from partners.
62. Managers and leaders have access to a wide range of management information, dashboards/scorecards and reports across all areas of practice, which they use effectively in order to manage the quality of practice at operational and strategic level. Case supervision and management oversight are diligent. The investment in AI pilots to support social work practice is enabling managers to spend more time in reflective, curious conversations with social workers, and these conversations are well captured in recording. Leaders have clear and systematic checkpoints throughout the child's journey to ensure oversight of children's progress.
63. Workforce stability is exceptionally strong, with a healthy distribution of experience levels among workers across all service areas. Workers are highly enthusiastic and positive about the organisational culture. Senior leaders model high standards and set the right conditions for safe and effective practice. Staff are well supported by experienced line managers, and by the practice development team, whose members value them, and care about them.
64. A wide range of learning and development opportunities at every stage of staff development enables staff to better understand children's experiences, risks and needs. Professional development is promoted and supported. This tangible commitment to the workforce is resulting in very high social worker retention rates, with no reliance on agency workers. This is a real strength for the organisation and a significant benefit for children and families.
65. While most of the workforce have manageable workloads, enabling them to spend quality time with the children and young people they are supporting, the workloads of personal advisers are too high. This is having an impact on timely

relationship building with children and young people preparing to leave care. PAs are delivering strong person-centred care for very vulnerable young people. For some, their PAs are a lifeline, but sustaining the position is a potential vulnerability. Leaders are aware of the pressures in the team and have plans to review capacity in this service.

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