

London Borough of Sutton

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection date: 14 November 2016 to 8 December 2016

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Children's services in Sutton are good		
1. Children who need help and protection		Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Good
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement
3. Leadership, management and governance		Good

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

Children's services in Sutton are good. The senior leadership team and elected members are committed and ambitious, and have a clear vision for service improvement. Leaders and managers have worked relentlessly since the previous Ofsted inspections in 2012 and 2013 to strengthen the workforce, and the appointment of permanent heads of service has brought an uncompromising focus on improving the quality of frontline social work practice. Clear expectations and a determination to do the right thing are making children in Sutton safer.

Families benefit from a well-coordinated and wide range of early help services, preventing harm and reducing the need for statutory intervention. This is making a significant difference, as almost all children and families receive help at the right time.

Senior managers demonstrate effective challenge, holding first- and second-line managers to account for monitoring and improving social work practice, so that all services for children are consistently good enough and improving. Senior managers know the strengths and weaknesses of their services through regular audit and case review, although the approach to improving practice as a result is not always sufficiently timely or systematic.

Help provided by children's social care is proportionate to risk. When statutory thresholds are met, a highly effective first response is provided through work undertaken in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). However, strategy discussions do not always involve all relevant partners to ensure that full multi-agency information informs the initial assessment of risk.

Partnership working is good at both strategic and operational levels in Sutton. Children in need services benefit from co-location with youth offending teams and a child psychologist. Together with a speech and language therapist, they provide specialist help and guidance to families and social work staff, responding quickly when support is needed and preventing escalation of risk. Children who have disabilities receive effective and sensitive help that is appropriate to their specific assessed needs.

Child and family assessments are comprehensive, and risk is analysed well. However, some do not fully take account of the impact of a child's culture or ethnicity to ensure that their needs are fully understood. Good-quality multi-agency child protection and children in need plans clearly set out concerns and risks to children, so that parents understand what needs to change. Plans are effectively reviewed and most are updated through regular core groups. Robust action is taken if change is not achieved, for example through proportionate use of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and pre-proceedings, safeguarding children and preventing delay.

Most children missing from home and care and those at risk of sexual and gang exploitation or radicalisation receive well-coordinated help and protection that reduce

harm and risk. Any concerns raised, together with local intelligence, are routinely shared and lead to an effective and collaborative multi-agency response. Social workers understand the nature of risks arising from child sexual exploitation and effectively use a child sexual exploitation tool that helps to measure and monitor the level of risk.

Children who are on the 'edge of care' receive a range of effective services, supporting them to remain in the care of their families when it is safe for them to do so. For some children, when this is not possible, appropriate alternative arrangements are made available quickly. Almost all children looked after live in good, stable placements that meet their needs well, and their wishes and feelings influence their plans.

Services for children looked after or those requiring adoption are good. Achieving permanence is effectively prioritised. Most children looked after in Sutton benefit from trusting and enduring relationships with social workers and the people who care for them. Foster carers demonstrate real warmth towards the children in their care and pride in their achievements. Almost all children looked after participate in their reviews, their wishes and feelings are carefully considered and they contribute to decision making. As a result, children looked after do well in education, the quality of placements is good and most children feel safe. A high number of children looked after attend good or better schools in Sutton, proactively supported by the virtual headteacher. Children looked after have their identity and diversity needs met well.

Children who need adoption benefit from good planning and support. Prospective adopters are assessed, trained and supported well, and the quality of post-adoption support is good. As a result, children thrive in their adoptive families.

The quality of help and support for young people leaving care is not consistently good enough. While many care leavers receive the help and support that they need to make a successful transition to adulthood, too many do not. Staff are not proactive enough in keeping in touch with the small number of care leavers who are less willing to engage, which means that risks are unassessed. Not all care leavers have up-to-date health assessments and health histories to help them to access appropriate services to meet their needs.

An active, well-established corporate parenting forum (CPF), supported by a highly ambitious and knowledgeable chair, ensures prioritisation of services for children looked after, and officers are held to account.

Children looked after participate in decisions that affect their lives, and their views are considered in the development of services. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is fully consulted, established and influential, and is working to expand its membership.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates no children's homes.
- The last inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children was in May 2013. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- The last inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in May 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since February 2012.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services, public health, leisure, arts, heritage and libraries.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since April 2014.
- The functions that the local authority has delegated to a third-party provider are:
 - Sutton Education Services (SES) Limited. This service began trading on 1 November 2016.
- The local authority commissions two services: the recruitment of foster carers; and the interviews of children and young people when they return home from going missing.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 46,190 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Sutton. This is 23% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 14% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 11% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 8% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 30% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.

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

- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian/British and Mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 27% (the national average is 20%).
 - in secondary schools is 22% (the national average is 16%).

Child protection in this area

- At 14 November 2016, 1,940 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 2,211 at 31 March 2016.
- At 14 November 2016, 200 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 163 at 31 March 2016.
- At 14 November 2016, three children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from one at 31 March 2016.
- Since the last inspection, four serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted, and three serious case reviews (SCRs) have been completed.

Children looked after in this area

- At 14 November 2016, 224 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 48.5 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 230 (50 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.

Of this number:

- 152 (or 68%) live outside the local authority area
 - 20 live in residential children's homes, all of whom live out of the authority area
 - three live in residential special schools,³ all of whom live out of the authority area
 - 114 live with foster families, of whom 64% live out of the authority area
 - two live with parents, one of whom lives out of the authority area
 - 18 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been nine adoptions
 - 13 children became subjects of special guardianship orders

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

- 96 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 27% subsequently returned to be looked after
- 26 young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
- three young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that services to care leavers are improved so that all personal advisers adopt a proactive approach and take all reasonable steps to keep in touch with all young people who have left care.
2. Ensure that young people have an up-to-date summary of their health history when they leave care, to support them to access services to meet their needs.
3. Ensure that all care leavers are in suitable accommodation and that any risks to their well-being are known and managed effectively.
4. Ensure that strategy discussions and meetings involve the full range of relevant agencies, so that multi-agency information informs the assessment of risk and that subsequent plans are routinely updated through regular core group activity to demonstrate progress.
5. Ensure that assessments of need consistently take into account culture and ethnicity, so that children receive services appropriate to their needs.
6. Ensure that all visits to children looked after comply with statutory requirements so that all children are seen regularly, in the place where they live and have the opportunity to speak to their social worker alone.
7. Increase the participation of children looked after and care leavers in the Children in Care Council.
8. Ensure that the agency decision maker undertakes an annual appraisal of the adoption panel chair and holds regular meetings with the chair to discuss the quality of practice.
9. Implement a system so that findings from audits are systematically actioned and senior managers regularly evaluate progress.
10. Ensure that members of the operational multi-agency sexual exploitation and 'missing' panel evidence that their collaboration reduces risk and that children are safer as a result of their interventions.

Summary for children and young people

- Services for children and families in Sutton are good. Managers and councillors are determined to improve the lives of children and young people, and do this well.
- When children and families need help, they receive the right help at the right time.
- Social workers spend time with children and their families to understand what life is like for them and what worries them. This helps social workers to make the right decisions for the children.
- Social workers, police officers, teachers, health workers and many others know what is needed to make children safe in Sutton, and they act quickly together to achieve this. Professionals are good at providing help to children who go missing or who are at risk of sexual or gang exploitation.
- If children who have disabilities cannot talk very easily, the people who work with them find imaginative ways to help them to express their views.
- Children and young people are helped to contribute to their plans and reviews, and their views are listened to, to help to make services better.
- Social workers help children and young people to live at home with their families if it is safe for them there. If a child or young person cannot live at home, social workers find the right families for children and carers or other family members support them to do well with their education and hobbies.
- If children and young people need extra help to talk about how they are feeling, there are many services that can help them and their families.
- Sutton's Children in Care Council works well, but the group needs to be bigger, so that more children and young people can share their experiences to help to improve services further.
- Young people who are leaving care usually receive the right support to help them to prepare for independence, find a job or continue their learning. Managers are trying hard to improve the service so that they keep in touch with all care leavers and make sure that they have plans that help them to do well as adults.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Leaders and managers take effective action to help and protect most children and young people and to keep them safe. Families benefit from a well-coordinated and wide range of early help services, preventing harm and reducing the need for statutory intervention. This is making a significant difference, as almost all children and families receive the right help at the right time.</p> <p>Help provided by children’s social care is proportionate to risk. When statutory thresholds are met, a highly effective first response is provided through work undertaken in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Managers provide good oversight, sharing information effectively with co-located police officers and health and education professionals, resulting in timely decisions and appropriate action to protect children. However, strategy discussions in the referral and assessment service (RAS) do not routinely include all relevant agencies.</p> <p>Child and family assessments are comprehensive, and risk is analysed well. Care is taken to ensure that the child’s views and experiences inform decisions and recommendations. Good-quality multi-agency child protection and children in need plans clearly set out professional concerns and risks to children, so that parents understand what needs to change. Plans are effectively reviewed, although not all are updated, and robust action is taken to safeguard children if required. When children are missing from home or when they may be at risk of sexual and gang exploitation, they receive well-coordinated help and protection that reduce harm and risk. Young people at risk of female genital mutilation receive effective help to reduce risk. Those young people who present as homeless at 16- and 17-years-old are helped to return home and, if they cannot, they are provided with suitable accommodation or are cared for appropriately by the local authority.</p> <p>Social workers see children regularly and work hard to ensure that they hear and act on children’s views. Advocacy services provided for children, and separately for parents, are helping them to contribute their views, wishes and feelings to assessments and plans.</p> <p>Strong multi-agency partnerships help to protect children from harm. There is a good range of services that provide effective, direct work to support families when there are issues of domestic violence and substance misuse, including alcohol and drugs. This leads to improved outcomes for children and families.</p>	

Inspection findings

11. Children and families receive effective support from a comprehensive early help offer. Early help assessments are detailed, appropriately identify the needs of children and families, and lead to specific actions that prevent escalation to statutory services. Schools are significant partners in service provision and, together with children's social care services, ensure that 'team around the family' processes improve outcomes. At the time of the inspection, early help assessments and access to service provision were primarily handled by the 'family matters' teams. The borough has recently relaunched its integrated and strategic approach to early help that, in time, is expected to reduce referrals to social care to obtain access to services.
12. Families and children receive help from a wide range of universal, targeted and specialist services. These include mentoring, advocacy and peer support for young people, cognitive behavioural therapy that is provided and commissioned through child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), specific support for building father and son relationships, mental health assessments for adults, substance misuse counselling, and budget and debt support. Many services are available to victims of domestic abuse, including refuges, freedom programmes and Women's Aid. Services are also available for perpetrators. Local voluntary organisations help women at risk of honour-based violence and forced marriage. In many cases seen by inspectors, these services are making a positive difference to outcomes for children and families, and they are preventing a need for further statutory intervention. Many families (560) benefited from early help intervention in 2015–16, an increase from 454 in 2014–15. This resulted in a significant reduction in cases subsequently being referred to statutory services. This demonstrates increasingly effective intervention at an early stage.
13. Thresholds for access to social care services are understood and applied appropriately. An effective MASH, resourced with staff including police and health and education professionals, has access to early help services via an early help coordinator. Decision making and responses are mostly timely and are made within 24 hours. They are informed by a good use of history and information gathered from other agencies. Interventions are proportionate to risk and, when children need to be safeguarded, actions ensure that child protection investigations are timely and thorough. However, strategy discussions and meetings with partners mostly involve only the police and social care and, as a result, potentially limit the full use of multi-agency information available to inform assessment of risk at the earliest opportunity.
(Recommendation)
14. Managerial oversight is evident in almost all cases seen. However, this is not yet consistently recorded, and is more visible in the MASH and 'family matters' teams than in assessment teams. As a result, decision making is more difficult

to follow. Managers are taking steps to improve the quality of records in these teams to demonstrate good and effective progress of work. Timely decisions to step down or progress cases to further assessment ensure that families receive appropriate responses to their needs.

15. The majority of assessments seen by inspectors clearly identify the risks presented to children through issues such as domestic violence and parental substance misuse. Social workers have a good understanding of the characteristics of neglect and the need to consider further intervention if circumstances change. This includes a clear analysis of risk with relevant recommendations for future action. The transfer of cases between teams is mostly effective, and cases remain within team if it is assessed to be in the best interests of children to complete the work to provide continuity.
16. Plans for children in need of further social care support are regularly reviewed and updated. However, actions and timescales are not sufficiently clear in a small number of plans, making it harder to measure progress. In a few cases, only one agency other than social care regularly attends planning meetings, meaning that work with families and children is not always benefiting from the range of possible multi-agency contributions available. However, work with children in need benefits from co-location with youth offending teams and the presence of a child psychologist, and a speech and language therapist provides specialist help and guidance to families and social work staff.
17. Children who have disabilities receive a service that is sensitive to their needs, with effective arrangements to ensure that they receive the most appropriate service in relation to identified safeguarding issues. These include consideration of the needs of other children in the family. Experienced and knowledgeable staff undertake detailed assessments and use imaginative practice to build relationships with non-verbal children and young people. Multi-agency working is well developed and effective in helping to ensure that children's complex needs are met.
18. Child protection investigations were timely in almost all cases seen, and children are not subjected to these investigations unnecessarily. Child protection assessments identify risks and plans effectively and have clear actions with timescales to minimise those risks. Child protection plans clearly identify the level of support to enable families to make changes. When positive change is not taking place, managers use the Public Law Outline and pre-proceedings processes, including the use of care proceedings, to take further action to safeguard children.
19. Child protection chairs operate an appropriate alert system that has successfully focused on improving compliance issues and is now addressing the quality of social work practice. Almost all alerts are resolved satisfactorily and within appropriate timescales. Child protection conferences are mostly timely. There are regular reviews of children when child protection plans have been in place

for more than a year, and close monitoring of progress has resulted in very low numbers of children remaining on plans for more than two years.

20. Regular core group meetings consider progress and review child protection plans. For a small number of children, gaps in core group meetings have resulted in some delays in updating child protection plans, although inspectors did not see detriment to children as a result. Core groups have appropriate multi-agency involvement and, in most cases seen, demonstrate progress in reducing risk to children. (Recommendation)
21. Most children missing from home and those at risk of sexual exploitation and/or gang exploitation receive well-coordinated help and protection that reduces harm and risk. Effective and timely communication in the MASH means that more children receive help early. This includes the monitoring of missing children, reviewed daily by the police and in the MASH. Concerns and local intelligence are routinely shared, which leads to an effective, collaborative multi-agency response. Children appropriately progress to section 47 enquiries and assessment if required. Examples seen of decisive action to remove children from home to live out of the area demonstrate appropriate decisions to reduce risk. Social workers understand the nature of risks arising from child sexual exploitation, and use a framework effectively to help to measure the reduction in risk. A commissioned service provides interviews to young people who go missing from home on their return.
22. Social workers see children alone and regularly. Examples of direct work seen clearly evidence the views of children. An established advocacy service for children aged eight years and over helps to ensure that their views are represented at case conferences, and advocates have attended a high number of conferences in the past year.
23. Recognition and analysis of cultural and ethnic background factors are inconsistent. Inspectors saw some very good work, for example in the case of a potential forced marriage, when the local authority recognised the risks and acted quickly to safeguard the young person. However, these issues are not always clearly recognised or taken into account in assessments and plans. There is better work with young people who have a disability or behavioural issues. (Recommendation)
24. The local authority maintains an up-to-date list of children missing education, and staff are proactive in tracing those children. The school attendance service manager and staff take prompt action when children become missing, and undertake all the necessary checks to establish their whereabouts, including checking council tax records and any history of social care involvement with families. They liaise effectively with other agencies when necessary to locate children, such as with the traveller education service, other local authorities and other professionals.

25. Good arrangements are in place to promote safeguarding practice in local schools. Schools fund a 'safeguarding in education' post, and all schools complete an annual safeguarding review. Staff receive training in a wide range of safeguarding issues, including female genital mutilation, risk of radicalisation and the use of social media. Policies are available for schools, for example on safe use of the internet. In the past year, the e-safety lead worked directly with over 2,500 children and over 600 parents, helping children and parents to recognise and understand risks associated with social media. Schools are aware of and use the wide range of useful contact points should they have concerns about a child's welfare, such as contact with the named senior practitioner, the education adviser in the MASH and the safeguarding in education officer.
26. Well-established multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) focus on both those most at risk and those who pose risk. Positive impact on repeated domestic violence incidents is evidenced by a reduction from 31% in 2015 to 26% this year, and by an increase in referrals to MARAC from 167 in 2015 to 208 in the year to November 2016. Offences of domestic violence that result in a formal sanction are consistently high in Sutton, with up to 35% of all reported cases placed in this category. Social care services have robust links with MAPPA and, in examples seen, appropriate actions, including referral to the designated officer when necessary, identify and manage risk.
27. Young people benefit from a robust multi-agency approach to identifying and assessing risk in relation to female genital mutilation. Actions and plans in all cases seen were effective in safeguarding young women. There is a clear referral pathway for mandatory reporting of actual female genital mutilation and good awareness by professionals of the Local Safeguarding Children Board reporting procedures.
28. A joint protocol with the housing department supports the provision of appropriate accommodation when young people aged 16- and 17-years-old present as homeless. They receive a thorough assessment of need, which may result in efforts to effect a return home or a decision by the local authority to provide care and accommodation.
29. The designated officer service is effective in safeguarding children. Numbers of cases have risen significantly, from 58 referrals in 2014–15 to 119 in 2015–16, as a result of increased awareness across agencies. The doubling of referrals has meant that completion timescales have fallen to 63% within a month and a further 36% within three months, which is outside the Department for Education timescales, although no detriment was seen to children in the cases sampled by inspectors.
30. Effective partnerships have been developed in Sutton to manage risk and to promote safeguarding against extremism and radicalisation. Referral pathways are clear. The local authority has developed and disseminated a Sutton 'Prevent' duty roadmap which details the risks and the required professional

response. A comprehensive bespoke training and awareness-raising programme was attended by 705 people in the past year, and 60 workshops to raise awareness of the 'Prevent' duty were delivered to staff in schools. Recent referrals seen by inspectors demonstrate effective multi-agency work, successfully safeguarding children and preventing concerns from escalating.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children on the 'edge of care' receive a range of good services that support them to remain safely in the care of their families whenever possible. Decisions for children to become looked after are timely and proportionate, and risk to those children is effectively reduced as a result. When children return home, they receive appropriate levels of support and good monitoring.</p> <p>Emerging and continued risk for children looked after is recognised, and swift action is taken to reduce it. This includes the risk of child sexual exploitation and going missing from care. When risk is not reduced, managers take effective protective measures to safeguard children.</p> <p>Children have trusting and enduring relationships with social workers and people who care for them. Foster carers demonstrate real warmth towards the children in their care and take pride in their achievements. Almost all children live in good, stable homes that meet their needs well, and their wishes and feelings influence plans. Children receive a good range of services, including direct work, therapeutic support and appropriate changes of environment that successfully reduce risk.</p> <p>The timeliness of children looked after reviews and children's participation is very good. Almost all children and young people participate in their reviews in some form, and their wishes and feelings are carefully considered and contribute to decision making.</p> <p>The virtual school is a strength, helping children to achieve to the best of their abilities. When children looked after experience problems, the virtual school intervenes effectively and works well with children, social workers, schools and other professionals to respond to changing needs and circumstances.</p> <p>Children who need adoption benefit from good planning and support. Prospective adopters are assessed, trained and supported well, and the quality of post-adoption support is good. As a result, children thrive in their adoptive families.</p> <p>Services for care leavers require improvement. Not enough care leavers have pathway plans, insufficient action is taken to re-engage young people when they lose touch, and a very small minority do not live in safe and suitable accommodation.</p> <p>The Children in Care Council is fully consulted, established and influential, and is working to expand its membership.</p>	

Inspection findings

31. Children on the 'edge of care' receive a range of helpful services. Services are effective in supporting children to remain in the care of their families when it is safe for them to do so. Some children receive help through family group conferencing, to secure appropriate alternative arrangements when they cannot remain at home. A recently introduced pilot programme offers crisis intervention in the evenings and at weekends, working intensively with parents to assess and reduce risk. Early indications are that it is successfully reducing the need for unplanned and emergency accommodation of children.
32. Pre-proceedings work and the use of the Public Law Outline (PLO) are effective. Regular legal planning meetings make appropriate and proportionate decisions. The use of pre-proceedings letters is appropriate and timely. Progress was regularly reviewed by senior managers in almost all cases seen and prevented unnecessary delay. The percentage of children placed at home under placement with parents regulations, at 1%, is very low. This demonstrates that work undertaken within the PLO is sufficient to satisfy the court that, if children do return home, it is safe for them to do so under a lesser order or no order at all. This reduces anxiety and uncertainty for parents and children and, in a small number of cases when there was delay, it was purposeful in achieving a positive outcome for the child.
33. Emerging and continued risk for the majority of children looked after is responded to well. This includes safeguarding issues and less immediate risks, such as risk of placement breakdown, potential detriment to their emotional health and risk of their not achieving to the best of their ability. As a result, almost all children looked after live in stable homes that meet their needs, based on a good understanding of strengths and risks. For a small minority of children whose placements were not stable, this was due to the highly complex needs of the young person, and managers actively and vigorously took appropriate action to pursue alternatives.
34. Foster carers spoken to by inspectors demonstrated real warmth towards the children in their care and pride in their achievements. Most carers had a positive experience of their own recruitment and have been involved in a number of activities supporting current recruitment, including preparation groups, mentoring and training. Recruitment of new foster carers is by a commissioned provider and, to date, has not been as successful as the local authority had anticipated. However, the local authority makes good use of external providers. While the quality of child permanence reports and matching reports is generally good, the quality of reports submitted to the fostering panel by the commissioned provider is more variable. The panel fulfils its quality assurance role assiduously and this, combined with the support that the local authority has offered to the provider to improve standards, means that the quality of reports on prospective foster carers is improving.

35. Quality assurance of providers is rigorous and ensures that children are living in homes that meet their individual needs well. This relentless focus on quality of provision has resulted in a dramatic improvement in short-term placement stability in the past 12 to 18 months. In 2014–15, 14% of children looked after had three or more placements. In 2015–16, according to local authority data, this was reduced to 4%. At the time of the inspection, the 2016–17 figure to date was also at 4%. Children feel settled and safe with their foster carers. There are insufficient local foster carers or residential places to meet the needs of all children looked after by Sutton. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no children separated from their brothers and sisters unless it was assessed as in their best interests, and no children were living in residential settings due to a shortage of foster homes.
36. Responses to children who go missing from care and those at risk of child sexual exploitation are robust, based on a detailed assessment of risk, balanced with protective factors. Children receive a good range of services, including direct work, therapeutic support and sometimes a change of environment, which are successfully reducing risk and helping them to recognise their own vulnerabilities. When risk does not reduce, managers take protective measures, including, when appropriate, use of secure accommodation. However, in a minority of cases, the recording of return home interviews is not consistently good, which limits a comprehensive understanding and analysis of motivating factors, patterns or triggers to improve planning and reduce risk. Managers are aware and are taking steps to address this.
37. In Sutton, the involvement of children looked after in decisions about their lives is a strength. While there has been historical turnover of staff in the children looked after service, this has stabilised in the past year. Caseloads are manageable and workers spend time getting to know children, using a variety of methods including direct work. Almost all children have been able to form positive, trusting relationships with their current social workers. Children are routinely seen, and good efforts are made to hear and represent their views. Inspectors saw some excellent work in which children's views appropriately influenced planning, for example in relation to contact, changes of carer and even holiday destinations. When children do not wish to express their views, an independently commissioned advocacy service represents their views well, although the current take-up of this is low.
38. Social workers regularly see children, but not all workers meet minimum requirements in relation to statutory visits, as some of these visits do not take place at the child's home and, in some cases, the child is not seen alone. In a recent survey by the Children in Care Council (CiCC), a small number of children who responded reported that they did not have the opportunity for a private conversation with their social worker. This does not enable children and young people to speak confidentially to their social worker and reduces the opportunity for social workers to assess them in their living environment.
(Recommendation)

39. Children's educational needs are well responded to at every stage of their journey. The virtual school headteacher and team maintain a good overview of children's and young people's progress and attainment. When children looked after experience problems, the virtual school staff intervene and work well with children, social workers, schools and other professionals to respond to changing needs and circumstances. The quality of planning for children's education is good, with nearly all children looked after having a good-quality, detailed and up-to-date personal education plan. This is an improvement from the last inspection.
40. In recent years, the data shows that children looked after achieve well, particularly those at key stage 2 and key stage 4, although provisional data for 2015–16 shows a dip in attainment, in part as a result of children who have special educational needs taking GCSEs. Staff at the virtual school link well with colleges and other providers to ensure that young people make a smooth transition from Year 11 to Year 12, with 83% of those leaving Year 11 in 2016 maintaining their education place at the end of the autumn term 2016.
41. Children looked after make good progress from their starting points and benefit from the additional support funded by the pupil premium grant. The grant is used effectively to build children's self-confidence and support their academic progress. The virtual school and others support children well to develop their wider interests and hobbies. For example, the number of children having tuition to play a musical instrument has increased significantly during the past year.
42. Nearly all children attend good or better schools. Most children looked after attend school regularly, and their attendance overall is improving. Early intervention by the virtual school means that there have been no permanent exclusions of children looked after in recent years. Children who are educated outside of the area receive a good level of effective support from the virtual school. The virtual school team is extending the support that it offers to children in the early years foundation stage to those placed for adoption and to young people who are leaving care.
43. Improving the timeliness of initial health assessments and review health assessments is a priority for the local authority. Concerted efforts to improve performance have had some positive results, but this is not yet consistent. In the first two quarters of 2016–17, 75% of children did not receive an assessment of their health needs within statutory timescales, meaning that children's health needs are not recognised and responded to as quickly as they should be. However, for children seen at this inspection, this did not delay access to timely primary healthcare.
44. Managers and staff have taken effective action to improve the numbers of children completing strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs), a behavioural screening questionnaire. The most recently reported figures of 76% for 2015–16 represent an improvement of 11% on the previous year, and managers are taking appropriate action to increase completion rates still

further. The quality of SDQs seen by inspectors was good, and a recently introduced policy in which the child, school and carers complete them, providing a holistic view of the child's needs, is good practice. As a result, SDQs are increasingly effective in identifying those children who would benefit from additional help.

45. When children need additional help for their emotional health, they receive a timely and child-focused service. The children looked after therapies service, co-located with the children looked after team, supports foster carers, social workers and residential workers when appropriate. Recently integrated with CAMHS, this seamless service for children provides the right service at the right time. As a response to feedback from children, a recently introduced online counselling service is showing early indications of success in reaching children who find it more difficult to engage.
46. Most children have their diversity and identity needs met very well. This includes sensitive responses to their needs arising from their cultural heritage and ethnicity. Work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, for example, ensures that they receive timely and appropriate support to match their cultural needs and to help them to adjust to an alien and potentially bewildering culture. Other identity needs arising from children's individual circumstances, such as their stage of development, the impact of educational needs or their complex family backgrounds, are also often recognised and responded to effectively.
47. The quality of assessment of children looked after is mostly good. Assessments are routinely updated, and this is good practice. Stronger assessments contain a clear analysis of children's lived experiences. A small number are insufficiently detailed, lack robust analysis and are not updated to reflect changes in the child's circumstances. While most care planning is good, written plans do not always reflect all of the work undertaken and often lack timescales, making it difficult to measure progress over time or hold agencies and families to account. Prior to this inspection, managers had identified the quality of written plans as an area for improvement through their own analysis of the service, although it is too recent to see any impact on practice.
48. Timeliness of children looked after reviews and children's participation in their reviews are very good. Almost all children participate in their reviews in some form, and their wishes and feelings are carefully considered and contribute to decision making. In most cases, the review process is effective, and minutes of review meetings are comprehensive and focused on children. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) maintain contact with children and social workers in between reviews through midpoint checks. However, quality assurance of practice, both within and between reviews, while increasing, does not yet consistently result in positive change. This reduces the overall effectiveness of an otherwise rigorous review process. Managers recognise that, while firm foundations are in place, more work needs to be done to ensure the speedy resolution of all issues raised by IROs.

49. While current planning for permanence is timely, some legacy issues mean that, for a large number of children (51) who are living in their permanent home, the plan for them to remain with their current carers is still to be formally agreed at panel. Although this could cause uncertainty for some children and carers, this was not seen in cases sampled by inspectors. Increasing numbers of children are benefiting from permanence achieved through special guardianship orders (SGOs). A very small number of foster carers report that a lack of clarity about the support available to them under an SGO is causing delay in deciding whether this is the right option for them and the children in their care. This is a missed opportunity, as there is a wide range of good, tailored support available, including continued social work support if needed.
50. The CiCC has completed some useful and effective work. However, this is over-reliant on the work of a dedicated small group of young people, and membership is not currently representative of all children looked after. In the recent survey undertaken by the CiCC, two thirds of the 48 children who responded had not heard of it. This demonstrates that the CiCC requires further significant support from the local authority to develop and represent the views of all children looked after. (Recommendation)
51. Children are encouraged to develop their talents and interests through a wide range of leisure and sporting activities. The local authority celebrates the achievements of children looked after well through an annual award ceremony that, this year, was designed, planned and hosted by the children themselves. This makes children feel valued, increases their confidence and teaches valuable skills to those involved in organising the event.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good

52. Achieving permanent homes for children who need adoption is a priority and a strength in Sutton. There have been 10 adoption orders made each year over the past four years, with six adoption orders made since 1 April 2016 and a further eight expected by 31 March 2017. Numbers of children subject to SGOs have markedly increased since 2014–15, demonstrating that permanence is a priority for Sutton. The quality of preparation of adopters is good, as is the quality of adoption support. This means that children benefit from a stable, permanent family.
53. Over the past 18 months, integration of adoption and permanence activity has resulted in senior managers having good oversight through regular tracking, permanence planning and family finding meetings. These tracking and monitoring systems are having a positive impact, as children who have come into care within the past 18 months are being placed for adoption in a timely way. The adoption service is stable, with experienced workers led well by an ambitious and knowledgeable head of adoption and permanence.

54. Child permanence reports (CPRs) are child centred and lead to informed decisions and plans. Adopters and voluntary adoption agencies spoken to by inspectors all said that they receive comprehensive information about children and are fully involved in discussions about matches and introductions. Children are well prepared for adoption. Carefully and sensitively completed adoption support plans are providing good information to adopters about children, which lead to well-planned introductions. Life-story books are more variable. While they are child centred and contain many photographs, they do not all provide information about the child's new family. Managers have already recognised the quality of life-story books as an area for improvement. Later-life letters are written in a clear and honest way, and provide a sensitive account of the child's history. There is an established system for coordinating the post box for indirect contact.
55. The average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family does not meet the government threshold, and the time between receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match with an adoptive family is longer than government expectations. However, in both cases, this is due to the tenacity of the local authority in identifying families for older children and those who have complex needs, and inspectors saw many examples of these children being successfully placed for adoption.
56. Adopters are recruited, prepared and trained to a high standard, showing good-quality recruitment and assessment practice. Adopters spoke positively about the quality of communication, engagement, training and support provided by the local authority. Prospective adopter reports are insightful and are particularly strong in the areas of diversity and identity when assessing those from minority ethnic backgrounds and same-sex couples.
57. Sutton is part of the South West London adoption consortium. There is a shared recruitment plan with a focus on increasing the numbers of adopters for older children and family groups, based on an analysis of the numbers, needs and profiles of children. At the time of the inspection, there were seven adopters approved, five of whom were considering matches. The average time that adopters wait for a match has reduced from four to two months over the past 18 months. The authority refers to the adoption register after three months if there is no match. Children's anonymised profiles are advertised nationally during care proceedings, minimising delay. There have been no foster-to-adopt placements in Sutton, and there is no specific policy, although all potential adopters are asked whether they would consider this.
58. The quality of post-adoption support is good, with a range of effective services for adopters and children who need them. A range of established post-adoption support groups are provided by the consortium for adults and children. This includes a group for adopted children focused on play, facilitated by a therapist, to help children to make sense of their experience and to enhance attachment to their adopters. There is no recent evaluation of the impact of this work, although there have been no reported adoption disruptions in the past two

years. Over and above the variety of support services available for adopters and children who need them, the local authority makes appropriate and timely referrals to the adoption support fund for additional specific therapeutic interventions for children and their parents, if this is their assessed need.

59. The adoption panel is appropriately constituted and well managed, and demonstrates effective oversight of adoption decisions and the approval of adopters. Feedback from adopters who have attended the panel is positive. The agency decision maker is suitably qualified and experienced, and meets with the adoption panel adviser routinely each month, and flexibly, to consider children's needs in a timely way. The adoption panel provides challenge when required and reports to the authority every six months on the quality of practice. However, the agency decision maker does not meet routinely with the adoption panel chair, and the chair has not had an appraisal for two years, which means that the panel chair is not being held to account effectively. (Recommendation)

The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it requires improvement

60. The leaving care team maintains good contact with most care leavers. However, the quality of help and support for young people leaving care is not consistently good enough.
61. The vast majority of care leavers receive the help and support that they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. Staff provide well-considered advice and guidance. However, a small minority of young people are not in touch with the service and personal advisers are not proactive in trying to reach them. In these instances, the responsibility is placed on young people to keep in touch and, as a result, personal advisers and their managers do not have an up-to-date understanding of these vulnerable young people, their needs or circumstances. (Recommendation)
62. Too many young people do not have an up-to-date pathway plan. The quality of plans varies too much and does not reflect the ambitions that managers and staff have for young people leaving care. Target setting is too often not specific enough, and sections of some plans are incomplete. The new management team completed a thorough audit of pathway planning in September 2016 and has put in place an effective action plan to improve the timeliness and quality of pathway planning so that young people's specific needs are assessed, understood and met.
63. A good range of activities promote care leavers' health and well-being. For example, the recent 'health awareness month' included a mixture of health-related events and activities. Young people who did not have up-to-date dental

checks benefited from a dentist and dental hygienist on site. They took part in workshops on contraception, sexual health, consent and healthy relationships. Healthy lifestyles are promoted by having free fruit available in the team's reception area and free weekly yoga sessions. The children looked after nurse attends the centre each week and is available to young people and staff for advice and support. However, not enough young people who became 18 years old in the last 12 months have an up-to-date health history, and only approximately a quarter of young people have an up-to-date health summary. (Recommendation)

64. Most social workers and personal advisers who met with inspectors know young people well. In most cases, the risks to young people are known, and social workers and personal advisers plan effectively to manage and reduce these risks. They understand their current needs and circumstances, and offer good support when young people experience day-to-day difficulties, or advise on the next steps that they need to take in their education or training. Nearly all young people live in safe and suitable accommodation. Young people spoken to told inspectors that they feel safe where they live. Managers recognise that they need to increase the availability of semi-independent social housing and to promote foster care better as an option for those young people aged over 18 years.
65. At the time of the inspection, managers were not aware of the risk to a very small number of young people aged over 18 years who live in bed and breakfast accommodation and in one house in multiple occupancy. While these young people have refused alternative housing options, staff from the leaving care team have not visited the young people and therefore have a limited understanding of the quality of the provision. Senior managers took decisive action during the inspection to ensure that young people do not live in bed and breakfast accommodation as a response to their housing needs. (Recommendation)
66. Social workers and personal advisers work effectively with those who arrive in the United Kingdom as unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. They are quickly provided with accommodation that meets their cultural and religious needs well. For example, they live with carers of a similar cultural background and are supported well to attend their local mosque or church. Education placements help young people to develop their spoken and written English skills quickly, and these young people make good progress in their learning.
67. Social workers, personal advisers, a specialist education, training and employment adviser, and the virtual school provide effective support that helps young people to secure education, training and employment that reflect their career aspirations. Current local data shows that a good proportion of care leavers are in education, employment and training (EET). Of the 190 young people aged 16 years or over, approximately three quarters are in EET, which is an improving proportion. Published data in March 2015 for young people aged 19- to 21-years-old showed that 48% were not in education, employment or

training (NEET), which is similar to England averages. The EET worker and personal advisers are providing good support, in most cases, to encourage more young people to engage in purposeful activity.

68. The local authority is good at encouraging and supporting young people to progress to higher education and provides good financial support for them. Eighteen care leavers are currently attending university. A range of practical workshops provide young people with help to write their curriculum vitae, gain interview skills and attend short courses to build their self-confidence. As a result, some young people have secured further work experience or access to skills-based training.
69. Care leavers told inspectors that they receive good support from staff, particularly in relation to their education. Staff help young people to explore their options for their next steps in education and provide them with equipment, such as laptops, to help them to complete their coursework. The local authority has identified that work to expand the number of apprenticeships for care leavers is underdeveloped, and it is taking action to increase opportunities. Care leavers are aware of and in receipt of their basic entitlements, such as college bursaries, transport costs and the setting up home grant. Young people spoken to said that they have a trusting and positive relationship with their personal advisers and social workers, who know them well, keep in touch with them regularly, and are interested and encouraging about their progress.
70. Care leavers receive good support from the leaving care team that helps them to manage their finances, budget effectively and, in some cases, manage debt. Personal advisers act as effective advocates for young people, for example by negotiating with energy suppliers about their outstanding debt. Workshops delivered by the leaving care team aim to develop young people's independent living skills. Foster carers and key workers use an independent skills checklist to support young people in developing the necessary skills that they need to manage independently.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>The senior leadership team and elected members in Sutton are committed and ambitious, and have a clear vision for service improvement, with many of the essential components in place to ensure further progress. Leaders and managers have worked relentlessly since previous inspections to strengthen the workforce. The appointments of permanent heads of service have brought an uncompromising focus on improving the quality of frontline social work practice. This has made a discernible difference. As a result, a child or young person in Sutton is more likely than a year ago to have regular visits, to receive effective help if they are at risk of harm and to receive good-quality care if they are unable to live with their parents. However, staff are not proactive enough in keeping in touch with those care leavers who are less willing to engage, resulting in the service not knowing the circumstances and risks to this group.</p> <p>Weekly performance meetings, led by senior staff, are bringing effective challenge to practice, holding first- and second-line managers to account for monitoring and improving social work practice, so that all services for children and young people will be consistently good enough. Clear expectations to do the right thing are making children in Sutton safer. While a wide range of routine and tailored auditing activity is scrutinised by senior leaders, an integrated system for implementing change and routinely reviewing impact is not sufficiently strong.</p> <p>The recently launched early help strategy builds on work undertaken previously, effectively drawing on the ethos of a multi-agency targeted approach.</p> <p>Partnerships in Sutton are strong, leading to the majority of children and young people in need of help and protection receiving an effective and prompt response from a wide range of commissioned services, readily accessible in both targeted and specialist teams.</p> <p>The corporate parenting forum (CPF) is developing effectively, supported by a knowledgeable and experienced lead member. A high number of children looked after attend good or better schools in Sutton, proactively supported by the virtual headteacher.</p> <p>Most children missing from home and care and those at risk of sexual and gang exploitation receive well-coordinated help and protection that reduce harm and risk. The revised monthly operational child sexual and missing MASE panel does not currently evaluate whether agencies know whether children are safer as a result of the help that they are receiving.</p>	

Inspection findings

71. The director of children's services (DCS), executive head of safeguarding and elected members are very aware of the detrimental impact of an unstable workforce on the quality of support to children and young people. Since 2013, they have worked relentlessly to strengthen the workforce and have placed a significant emphasis on becoming a learning organisation, ensuring that lessons learned from serious case reviews (SCRs) and complaints improve practice. Heads of service rightly focus on improving the quality of frontline practice to create a supportive and stable environment for social work to thrive. Clear expectations to do the right thing are making Sutton children safer.
72. The workforce strategy is comprehensive and ambitious and has been effective in reducing a previous heavy reliance on agency staff. A range of initiatives, including the development of a newly qualified social worker academy and a successful overseas recruitment campaign, have begun to stabilise the workforce and have resulted in a significant reduction in agency staff from 37% in 2015–16 to a projected 23% by January 2017. The information on why staff leave is used effectively to prevent attrition. For example, increased resources to reduce caseloads to less than 20 children and the co-location of social work teams are improving morale. As a result, a vulnerable child living in Sutton is more likely than a year ago to be visited regularly, to be listened to by the same social worker, and to receive the appropriate level of help and protection. This is leading to positive changes for most children and their families.
73. Weekly performance meetings, led by senior staff, are bringing effective challenge to practice, holding first- and second-line managers to account for monitoring and improving social work practice, so that all services for children are consistently good enough. In some instances, action to respond to the findings of audits has been slow. For example, delays were found in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in February 2016, but action to reduce delay was not taken until September 2016. (Recommendation)
74. Staff have access to high-quality multi-agency training and development opportunities that effectively promote integrated working to support children, young people and families. Expectations and standards are high, and assertive action is taken to manage staff who fall below those standards. Most social workers are tenacious in their efforts to engage with children and families in most parts of the service. Recent robust and considered action has been taken by senior managers to address deficits in the care leavers' service. However, this has not yet resulted in good enough management and delivery of help and support to this vulnerable group. A well-structured pathway for social workers to access the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) has seen eight newly qualified social workers successfully completing their ASYE in December 2016. The recording of supervision is of variable quality, despite a large investment in training. In better case files, in which the 'strengthening families' model is used, there is clarity about risks, with a better focus on the child's lived experience. Leaders recognise this as an area for further

development, and the training and development strategy has appropriate focus on improving management analysis and reflective supervision.

75. Elected members are well informed and have high aspirations for all children in Sutton. The CPF is developing effectively, supported by a knowledgeable and experienced lead member. A high number of children looked after attend good or better schools in Sutton, proactively supported by the virtual headteacher. The chair ensures that the board focuses on improving outcomes, for example the timeliness of health and dental assessments, and has raised issues with partners about poor performance. Placement stability for children is mostly good, although the quality and support to care leavers varies. In Sutton, the established and influential Children in Care Council (CiCC) is working to expand its membership. Members and senior officers recognise that apprenticeships for care leavers are underdeveloped.
76. Partnership working is good, both at strategic and operational levels. Working arrangements between highly committed elected members, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) chair, the DCS and the chief executive are in line with statutory guidance, and are subject to appropriate and formal governance protocols, so that officers are held to account. Links between the Health and Wellbeing Board, public health, the Children's Trust and Sutton Safer Partnerships boards are strong, leading to well-defined and shared safeguarding priorities. The joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) is focused on the needs of local children and young people, and leads to shared understanding and priorities, for example the investment in services for children in Sutton who have emotional difficulties. Key overarching strategies and plans are of good quality, and objectives and priorities align so that when resources need to be reduced to make savings, for example the reduction in the number of children centres, careful consideration is given to limiting the likely impact on vulnerable children.
77. A developing children's joint commissioning strategy, on a local and sub-regional basis, is addressing sustainability and sufficiency. It effectively draws on both the children looked after needs analysis and the JSNA, informed by learning from SCRs and the views of children, young people, parents and carers. Timely action in response to service deficiencies or new demands ensures that a wide range of services are available and readily accessible in both early help and specialist settings. These include cognitive behavioural counselling, help for parents who have drug and alcohol problems or those affected by domestic violence. Contracts with providers are subject to robust safeguarding quality assurance processes that include routine monitoring and review, in collaboration with frontline social workers and their managers.
78. Most children missing from home and care and those at risk of sexual and gang exploitation or radicalisation receive well-coordinated help and protection that reduce harm and risk. A designated data analyst, in post since April 2016, has significantly improved the quality of analysis and understanding of the profile of victims and perpetrators. For example, 70% of 'missing' episodes link to

children at risk of sexual exploitation. Effective use of technology to map, track, and disrupt perpetrators is successfully identifying local areas where children congregate and are at risk. Community police, the local authority sexual exploitation lead officer, schools and staff in alternative education provision are actively involved in monitoring vulnerable children in these areas. The revised monthly operational MASE panel does not currently ensure that agencies routinely evaluate whether children are safer as a result of the help that they are receiving. (Recommendation)

79. Leaders and managers actively support and encourage children's participation. Almost all children participate in their reviews. Their wishes and feelings are carefully considered and contribute to decision making. Advocates and independent visitors are available to support children looked after and those subject to child protection plans to make representation at meetings or to raise complaints. Young people in Sutton are consulted in developing CAMHS services, and are the largest group involved in service development in south west London. They have been involved in delivery of webinars with a non-profit organisation in response to the CAMHS counselling offer. Their views are acted on, and they influence ways in which services are delivered. Changes have been made to services as a result. For example, online counselling is now available for hard-to-reach young people.
80. Sutton has effective relationships with the child and family court advisory and support service (Cafcass), the family courts and the local family justice board (FJB). The local authority's timeliness for the duration of care proceedings is improving, now at 32 weeks, effectively reducing delay for children and young people. The joint delivery of training by the LSCB and the FJB is as a result of findings from a high-profile SCR. Sutton is an active partner, financially contributing to the development of the South London Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC), which will be operational from April 2017. The FDAC will be part of a study to prevent repeat applications from families that have features of drugs and alcohol misuse.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

The Local Safeguarding Children Board in Sutton is well led by an independent chair, who, since her arrival in 2014, has brought a rigorous focus to safeguarding vulnerable children. The board, actively supported by the multi-agency partnership and local political leaders, has established clear priorities. These combined factors have resulted in continuous improvement, with explicit evidence of agencies being held to account for delivering good outcomes.

The findings of multi-agency audits lead to action plans and improvements being swiftly implemented. For example, a review of the multi-agency threshold document culminated in relaunching the early help strategy, ensuring that most children receive appropriate targeted help that prevents harm from escalating.

Findings from multi-agency and section 11 audits completed in the past 12 months demonstrate effective challenge of poor safeguarding practice in a number of priority areas. As a result of interventions by the board, inspectors found stronger recent multi-agency practice in the multi-agency safeguarding hub and in the provision of services to protect children at risk of sexual and gang exploitation and those missing from home and care. A good understanding of radicalisation and female genital mutilation has led the board to adopt a comprehensive model with which to identify and monitor the impact of work likely to affect these groups of children.

In the past year, the board has published three serious case reviews, including that of Child D, a case that received much national media attention. The board has undertaken an extensive range of work to ensure that the learning reaches practitioners, managers and leaders, and improves practice. Recurring and important themes from individual reviews, collated into a 'heat map', help to identify visually the learning points, and these form actions in a delivery plan for individual sub-groups to oversee. Findings have led to increased specific commissioned services, for example integrated services to support young people who have emotional difficulties.

While the board's annual report for 2015 demonstrates an awareness and critique of its own performance, it does not offer a rigorous and transparent evaluation of general safeguarding practice across the partnership.

Recommendations

81. Ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report demonstrates a comprehensive evaluation of a range of safeguarding activity across agencies, which clearly identifies the areas for improvement.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

82. Governance arrangements between the LSCB and the local authority in Sutton are effective. A strong, credible, well-respected chair has engendered a culture of openness, honesty and robust challenge, relentlessly driving significant safeguarding improvements across the partnership. An example of challenge leading to improvement is in the MASH, where the board has continuously challenged all partners to ensure improvements in practice. The most recent challenge has led to changes in management arrangements and the introduction of an information sharing protocol. Multi-agency audits of work within the MASH have demonstrated that work is showing steady improvement. Challenge within the board and the resulting action are clearly recorded in the minutes of both the main board and the sub-groups.
83. The chair meets regularly with the chief executive, the leader of the council, the lead member for children's services and the DCS, and they hold each other to account for progress on identified areas for improvement. The board works well with other strategic partnerships, providing challenge to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Children's Trust Board, the Safer Sutton Partnership and the Safeguarding Adults Board to provide priority planning for children. Responsibilities and accountabilities are clear. For example, the Children's Trust has responsibility for operational implementation of the framework for children who have disabilities and the early help strategy.
84. The LSCB has a clear structure, and managers from all partner agencies are involved in the board and its seven sub-groups, undertaking work effectively in key development areas. This includes a human resources sub-group, which has helped organisations to include children and young people in the recruitment process. Many positions in children's social care and health organisations now include young people in the selection of staff. The human resources sub-group has worked to improve workforce stability, and this has been especially effective in children's social care. The LSCB chair has regular joint meetings with the chairs of the sub-groups to ensure that work is progressing and to maintain joint responsibility for actions across the partnership. Business support for the board is effective and leads to good coordination across the sub-groups. The board receives financial contributions from the relevant key agencies, ensuring that appropriate reserves are available so that any unforeseen expenses, such as SCRs, are adequately resourced.

85. The board receives and reviews a range of relevant performance reports and updates that are scrutinised and challenged by the quality assurance sub-group before consideration at the board. A good example of effective challenge leading to a positive outcome was the improvement of general practitioners' involvement in child protection conferences. This has risen from 9% to a current level of 42%, with a target of 70%.
86. The LSCB reviews a comprehensive dataset with organisations, which now provides narrative to accompany and explain the information. The board continues to work with partners to develop the dataset further and to offer regular challenge. An example of this is data relating to young people who go missing, in which discrepancies between the different organisations led to the introduction of a weekly triangulation meeting. This provides an opportunity for organisations to compare data to ensure that it is consistent and robust. The quality assurance sub-group has started to interrogate the data thematically by organisation, on a rolling basis, to ensure its accuracy, and this is leading to improvements in the quality of data provided. This means that the board has a better understanding of strengths and areas for improvement to continue to challenge partner agencies.
87. Areas for multi-agency audits identified and prioritised through SCRs are scrutinised by the quality assurance sub-group, which develops action plans that swiftly lead to improvements. For example, the recent audit into children looked after who have moved multiple times led to the implementation of a 'stop the clock' approach. A risk-planning meeting ensures that professionals think cooperatively and creatively before the child moves. Workshops to share lessons learned have ensured that staff are aware of the new approach. As a result, two cases highlighted recently for risk-planning meetings involved a range of agencies that attended to identify, manage and share risk.
88. The LSCB undertakes regular section 11 audits, and most agencies complete their returns. There is a good level of analysis and scrutiny of the returns, with appropriate challenge when there is a lack of evidence. Partner agencies prioritise safeguarding and ensure that voluntary and community groups are fully aware of their responsibilities. The board has commissioned a community engagement officer to raise awareness, as well as to gather the views of community members. This helps these partner organisations to make sure that they meet the section 11 standards to improve the quality of safeguarding practice across the partnership.
89. The child death overview panel (CDOP), currently shared with another local authority, is commissioned through that authority's clinical commissioning group. However, board members identified that this did not fully meet the needs of Sutton. The board has taken the decision to de-commission the panel and develop a stand-alone CDOP from January 2017. Since the summer, a parallel process has been in place to ensure a successful transition, and this is working well.

90. The board has published three SCRs during the past year, including Child D, a case that received much national media attention. The board has undertaken an extensive range of work to ensure that identified learning reaches practitioners, managers and leaders. The chair and the report author have highlighted the national implications. All sub-groups have been involved in implementing the learning to ensure that practice improves as a result. For example, this has led to an offer to headteachers of supervision and support, to enable them to deal with particularly challenging parents.
91. The case review sub-group has collated recurring and significant themes from individual reviews into a 'heat map' to help visualise the learning points and inform a delivery plan for individual sub-groups to oversee. This has enabled improvements in practice, for example ensuring routine enquiry in relation to domestic violence in health settings. Individual reviews also inform practice changes. For example, following the SCR on Child E, the review panel recommended a need to improve health assessments in terms of cultural and identity issues. An audit undertaken to assess impact has led to the development of training planned for January 2017. A further re-audit in July 2017 is planned to evaluate whether the learning is improving practice.
92. The board has challenged the provision of child sexual exploitation services and established a MASE strategic sub-group to oversee this work, leading to significant improvements over the past 12 months. The appointment of a child sexual exploitation and missing children data analyst is improving local intelligence of risk areas. Data about where children go missing, where child sexual exploitation incidents occur and the location of incidents of domestic violence provides infographic representations of hotspots and areas of concern. This enables the LSCB to understand the prevalence of the issue in Sutton and helps individual partners to make improvements. The board has a good understanding of other vulnerabilities, such as radicalisation and female genital mutilation. A comprehensive model for identifying and responding to female genital mutilation is due to be launched in February 2017. The model, piloted in a maternity hospital, has led to an increase in referrals and in the provision of specialist support for adult victims.
93. While the board has taken a decision not to have a youth board, it maintains a strong focus on understanding the views of children. The board sought views of children and young people in the development of the business plan. It has commissioned a part-time young people's engagement officer to assist with this, and young people were involved in the recruitment process for this post. The board has developed a video of a young person talking about her experiences of being homeless, which now forms part of the LSCB 'missing' training. The voices of children and families influence service development. For example, community health services have developed an 'app' which allows immediate confidential feedback to be gathered when they visit families. This has led to changes that make services more accessible for parents, such as moving the provision of baby clinics to children's centres.

94. There is a good range of free, relevant training provided by the LSCB aimed at all practitioners who work with children, including voluntary and community organisations. The training, informed by learning from SCRs as well as national and local policy developments, is evaluated immediately following the event and at three- and six-monthly intervals to assess the impact on practice. Online training is also available to all partner organisations, and this is increasing the number of voluntary and community organisations that access training.
95. The LSCB annual report details learning from SCRs, prevalence data and population information. The business plan and work stream plan are based on the priorities identified in the report. While the board's annual report 2015 demonstrates an awareness and critique of its own performance, it does not offer a rigorous and transparent evaluation of general safeguarding practice across the partnership. (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 that 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 whom 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 eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and one additional inspector.

The inspection team

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