

Warrington Borough Council

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection date: 24 February – 20 March 2015

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The overall judgement is that children's services require improvement

The authority is not yet consistently delivering good protection and help for children, young people and families.

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

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

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

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.

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

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The local authority

Summary of findings

Children's services in Warrington require improvement because:

Management oversight, challenge and decision making

- Not all front line managers are providing sufficiently robust challenge to improve the quality of assessments and this prevents consistently good decision making.
- Managers at all levels were unaware of the impact of inconsistent practice in a small number of cases that inspectors drew to their attention during the inspection. In these cases action was needed to strengthen current intervention to ensure children received the right help to meet their needs.
- In a small number of cases, there were delays in taking decisive action to protect children through the use of the public law outline.

Workforce development

- Line management supervision is not consistently effective in improving the quality of social work practice across the service. Despite a clear strategy for continuing professional development, a culture of positive challenge to promote individual learning is not fully embedded.

Performance monitoring and quality assurance

- Some challenges by independent reviewing officers (IROs) and child protection chairpersons have not been acted on in a timely way or effectively monitored.
- Neither the local authority nor the LSCB has taken the necessary steps to understand the circumstances of the children affected by the increase in the use of police powers of protection. This means that they have not established whether there were opportunities for earlier action to be taken thereby avoiding the need for emergency intervention.

Consistency of practice

- Multi-agency procedures to respond to child sexual exploitation have not been implemented consistently by frontline staff, which means that children are not being supported effectively.
- The arrangements to assess 16- and 17-year-old young people who present as homeless are not sufficiently robust.
- When looked after young people return home in an unplanned way, timely assessments and support are not consistently provided.

What does the local authority need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

Management oversight, challenge and decision making

1. Line managers should improve management oversight and challenge for the quality of assessments, so that analysis of risk and the quality of decision making are improved.
2. Senior managers should take action to ensure that the recommendations made by IROs and child protection chairs are acted upon promptly.
3. Senior managers should ensure that the legal gateway process is effective in assisting the implementation of pre-proceedings and in monitoring the progress of cases to prevent avoidable delay.

Areas for improvement

Workforce development

4. Ensure that frontline managers receive good support and challenge through effective supervision and training.

Performance monitoring and quality assurance

5. Senior managers and relevant partners should review the circumstances of all children made subject to police powers of protection and explore whether there were missed opportunities for earlier intervention which would have precluded the necessity for emergency action to remove the child from home.
6. Senior managers should improve the quality of management information on care leavers so that interventions can be more effectively targeted and monitored.

Consistency of practice

7. The local authority should ensure that the multi-agency procedures developed to respond to child sexual exploitation are fully understood and consistently applied in practice by its frontline workers and managers.
8. Social workers and their line managers should reassess promptly the circumstances of children who cease to be looked after in an unplanned way with a view to providing timely and appropriate further support.
9. The local authority should ensure that the arrangements to assess 16 and 17-year-old young people who present as homeless are sufficiently robust so that their needs and risk are identified and appropriate support is offered.

10. Social workers and line managers should ensure that Pathway Plans consider the emotional well-being of care leavers and that reviews are overseen by qualified social workers.
11. Social workers and their line managers should update assessments and care plans to ensure that they are properly focused on the needs of children.
12. Social workers and conference and review chairpersons should consider in all cases whether children and young people would benefit from an advocate to enable them to express their views.

Commissioning and Sufficiency

13. The local authority, in conjunction with its partners, should devise and implement a strategy to support children on the edge of care.
14. The local authority should continue to implement the emerging commissioning programme to expand the range of supported housing provision for care leavers aged 16 to 18 and for vulnerable care leavers who are aged over 18, to enable them to undergo a phased transition to independent living.

The local authority's strengths

15. There is strong political and corporate support for children's services and budgets have been protected. The DCS and senior management team have acted decisively to improve outcomes for children in Warrington, including for care leavers and health outcomes for children in care. A systematic approach is taken to tackling areas for improvement from previous inspections.
16. Partnership working is strong. The combined Families and Wellbeing Directorate, formed in 2014, has created new opportunities for collaborative work across children's and adult's services. This is providing more focused joint commissioning of services such as domestic abuse services, children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing services and short break provision.
17. Troubled families work in Warrington is implemented through the 'Complex Families' programme and is making a positive difference. A virtual team of 27 professionals drawn from a wide range of partner agencies is helping families to make positive changes in their lives. Phase one of the programme (up until the end of January 2015) has seen significant progress made by 77% of the 345 families who have been supported.
18. Effective tracking arrangements and partnerships with the Local Family Justice Board swiftly secure legal permanence through the family court. Care proceedings are concluding within 23 to 24 weeks, which is better than the national average of 29 weeks.

19. The local authority has a sufficient number of adopters through an effective partnership arrangement (WWiSH) with two other local authorities, Wigan and St Helens. This provides good choice for children and enables them to be appropriately matched. There have been no placement disruptions in the last year.
20. The family outreach team is piloting a 'whole family' CAF (common assessment framework) to support all families in need of early help. These high quality assessments take a holistic view and lead to specific family support plans addressing identified needs and risks.
21. Social workers carry out good quality specialist parenting assessments and 'protector' assessments, which consider a parent's ability to protect their child from risk presented by other adults.
22. Robust systems ensure the speedy identification of children who are missing education. This enables timely interventions to understand the reasons for absences and to re-engage the young person.
23. The educational outcomes for children looked after are better than for looked after children nationally. Warrington Virtual School has been running a book scheme since 2011. The original aim was to improve literacy levels. Initially the scheme provided a pack of books once a term for children in care in Key Stage 2, but is now being extended. The scheme has been particularly successful in that in 2014, 90% of children in care were at or above level 4 in reading at the end of Key Stage 2. In addition, feedback from users of the scheme is overwhelmingly positive.
24. A high proportion of children and young people are placed in foster care within the local authority and are close to home. This increases the opportunity for children to remain at their current school and reduces disruption to their routines. It also means that contact between children and their family and friends is better promoted and supported.
25. Warrington keeps in touch with all its care leavers, providing careful attention to their pathway planning and transition to independent living. Personal Advisors 'go the extra mile' to engage with young people and are persistent in keeping in contact with care leavers who disengage from the service.
26. The gap in the number of care leavers who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) compared with their non-looked after peers is substantially reducing, with an improvement for 16–18 year-olds over the last three years. This is the result of a targeted approach to prioritising services with a range of partners through the NEET strategy group and improving participation group.

Progress since the last inspection

27. Warrington Borough Council's safeguarding arrangements were inspected in November 2009. The local authority was judged to be inadequate. A re-inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services took place in February 2011, when the local authority was found to have made adequate progress in addressing the serious child protection concerns identified. The authority was judged adequate overall at this inspection for both safeguarding and looked after children services.
28. The local authority undertook an audit of its progress in addressing safeguarding concerns in January 2013 and identified further areas for improvement. Although positive action has been taken to ensure that children and young people are protected, there remain some planned actions that are not consistently embedded in practice. These include: analysing the impact of historical information in assessments and the needs arising out of ethnicity, culture and religion; ensuring that general practitioners (GPs) contribute to child protection planning; ensuring that assessments for looked after children are updated as needs change and the need to increase the number of foster carers.
29. The local authority's fostering service was last inspected in August 2013 and judged to be good. The authority has fully addressed the two recommendations for improvement at this inspection. Of positive note is the progress made in ensuring that foster carers achieve the children's workforce development standards. Currently almost 90% of carers have completed workbooks.
30. The local authority's adoption service was inspected in February 2010 and was judged to be satisfactory. The authority has made good progress against the almost all of the ten areas for improvement that were identified. This includes developing and implementing an effective recruitment strategy for adopters under the strong partnership arrangements of WWiSH, and improving the quality of child permanence reports. However, the timely completion of life story work remains an area for improvement.
31. The pace of change and improvement since the last inspection in 2011 has been steady overall. Progress in embedding consistency of practice has slowed in the past year as a result of a number of senior managers leaving the authority and experienced social workers being promoted internally. Senior leaders have provided strong leadership during this period, restructuring services to better meet the needs of children and families. Positive change is seen in the identification of children in need of help and protection, particularly in relation to neglect. This has resulted in increased numbers becoming subject to child protection plans and for some becoming looked after. Good progress has also been made in improving permanence for looked after children, and outcomes relating to their health, education, and life chances. Leaders are ambitious and appropriately focused on improving consistency in practice so that all children, young people and their families receive good quality services.

Summary for children and young people

- When children, young people and families first need help there is lots of support available. Different people work together, such as schools, children's centres and youth services, so that families get help to make improvements. The local authority is looking more closely to check how this support is helping families to make changes in their lives.
- Assessments and decision making for children who need help to keep safe are not always good. This means that on occasions a small number of children do not get the help they need quickly enough. We have asked the local authority to look at how managers and the people who chair child protection meetings check that children get the right help at the right time to keep them safe.
- Social workers say they enjoy working in Warrington. They know the children and young people they work with well, help to make sure that they are kept safe from harm and ensure that important meetings happen on time.
- Social workers and their managers feel supported in their work. They receive regular training so that they can continue to support and help children and young people well. Senior managers check their work but do not always find out if things are getting better for children and young people, or whether things could be done differently.
- When it is necessary for children and young people to become looked after in Warrington, their needs are met well and outcomes get better. For example, the local authority makes sure that children go to school regularly and it provides support so that children make progress and do well at school.
- When it is time to leave care, the local authority makes sure that young people have suitable places to live, with some choosing to stay with their foster carers. Personal advisors help to prepare young people for living on their own. Care leavers receive a lot of support to access education or training or to get a job.
- Adoption services are doing a good job by making sure that children are placed with their new 'forever' family quickly. The local authority has plans in place to make sure that work to help young people to understand their life story happens quickly.
- Senior leaders in Warrington are passionate about and committed to improving the lives of children and young people. They make sure that children in care get the right support so that they do well.
- We have asked the local authority to improve services further and to check how managers make decisions for some children, young people and families who need help or looking after.

Information about this local authority area

Children living in this area

- Approximately 44,300 children and young people under the age of 18 live in Warrington. This is 22% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 15% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - In primary schools is 12% (the national average is 17%)
 - In secondary schools is 10% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 6% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian and Asian British.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - In primary schools is 6% (the national average is 19%)
 - In secondary schools is 4% (the national average is 14%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31 January 2015, 1,021 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,066 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31 January 2015, 215 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 170 at 31 March 2014.
- At 31 January 2015, four children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from six at 31 March 2014.
- Since the last inspection, one serious incident notification has been submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review is on-going at the time of inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 January 2015, 294 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 66 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 232 (52.0 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2014. Of this number:
 - 112 (or 38%) live outside the local authority area, of whom 21 live 20 miles or more outside the area
 - 49 live in residential children's homes, of whom 71% live out of the authority area

- eight live in residential special schools³, of whom 100% live out of the authority area
 - 186 live with foster families, of whom 31% live out of the authority area
 - 28 live with parents, of whom 4% live out of the authority area
 - one child is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child.
- In the last 12 months (from 1 April 2014):
- there have been 9 adoptions
 - 12 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 74 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 14% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - six children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates six children's homes. All were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children's Services has been in post since August 2014.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has been in post since September 2012.

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for fewer than 295 days.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
<p>Summary</p> <p>No children and young people were found to be unsafe and not being supported during the course of this inspection.</p> <p>The quality of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) assessments is too variable. The local authority is beginning to examine more closely the impact of early help where there is a CAF assessment, to find out why the level of need for some families does not reduce with the support provided.</p> <p>The quality of decision making and assessment for children needing help or protection is not consistently good. This leads to a small number of children not receiving the right help to meet their needs.</p> <p>Management overview is not sufficiently strong in all cases to ensure that poor practice is identified and rectified. Actions to support children are not always sufficiently focused on addressing broader risk factors in the case. In some cases, this includes delays in consideration and implementation of legal proceedings.</p> <p>Challenge by child protection chairs, including where they use established escalation procedures, does not always lead to sufficiently swift action by social workers and managers to improve practice.</p> <p>In cases known to be in crisis, children’s services has not taken steps to analyse whether there have been missed opportunities to intervene earlier without recourse to the use of police powers of protection.</p> <p>Comprehensive multi-agency procedures to respond to child sexual exploitation have not been implemented consistently by frontline staff, which means that some children are not being supported effectively.</p> <p>Arrangements for assessing the circumstances of homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are insufficiently robust.</p> <p>The work of the family outreach service is of consistently good quality and is improving the provision of help for families at an early stage.</p> <p>The quality of specialist parenting assessments and ‘protector’ assessments, which consider a parent’s ability to protect their child from risk presented by other adults, is good.</p> <p>Effective systems are leading to timely intervention with children who are missing education.</p>	

32. No children or young people were identified during this inspection as being unsafe or not supported. In the vast majority of cases where children are at risk of significant harm they are responded to swiftly. Strategy discussions are held promptly, but often only include children's social care and the police. This potentially limits the extent of the information available and, consequently, the robustness of the planned response. In examples of more complex cases, strategy meetings were held with good attendance from all relevant partners, followed by review meetings when these are needed. In a small number of cases seen by inspectors, decision making was not consistent with potential risk. For example, cases were closed without a full assessment of need and in others the rationale for case closure did not correspond with the risk factors in the case. The local authority has taken immediate action to ensure that risks beyond the presenting risk have now been fully addressed in these cases.
33. When children, young people and families experience challenges in their lives, they can access a wide range of early help services, including children's centres and targeted youth services for drug and alcohol advice. The family support model is embedded well across Warrington, with agencies having a clear understanding of thresholds at levels one, two and three.
34. The quality of CAFs is too variable. The local authority is aware of this through quarterly audits. In June 2014, the authority's audit showed that 37.5% of CAFs were of good quality, and this increased to 41% in December 2014. The quality of assessment can be linked to the lead agency undertaking the CAF. The better assessments were those completed by professionals in the family outreach team. There were gaps in six out of ten CAFs sampled as part of the inspection. The information gathered is not fully analysed, and actions set are not always specific in identifying what needs to improve, what support will be given, and in what timeframe. As a result, in October 2014, CAF workshops were introduced to help professionals to complete good quality assessments. A re-audit of the quality of CAFs demonstrates that the workshops are helping to improve the quality of assessments.
35. The local authority is measuring the impact of access to early help services using a four point scale of need linked to the five outcomes of be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, positive contribution and economic wellbeing. Between April 2013 and the end of December 2014, a total of 272 children and young people had an episode of family support. Of these, 48% showed improved outcomes, 22% had an increased level of need and 30% maintained their current level of need. The authority recognises that it needs to understand better why outcomes for different children and young people improve, remain the same, or show an increased level of need following a period of early intervention.

36. The family outreach team is piloting a family CAF, to support those families with more complex needs. These assessments take a holistic view of the whole family, and lead to appropriate and specific family support plans that address well identified needs and risks. Family outreach team members attend transfer meetings to discuss families who need to step up to statutory intervention or step down to family support, and this is helping to ensure that children receive appropriate and timely support.
37. Troubled families work in Warrington is implemented through the 'Complex Families' programme, and is making a positive difference. A virtual team of 27 professionals drawn from a wide range of partner agencies is helping families to make positive changes in their lives. Phase one of the programme has seen a significant improvements for 77% of the 345 families supported through the programme as at January 2015. Work is continuing with the 23% of families where support is yet to have a positive impact.
38. Partner agencies are clear about thresholds for referral to children's social care, and all contacts are appropriately overseen by a social work manager within the duty and assessment team. This has enabled an appropriate reduction in the number of repeat referrals received by children's social care, from 22% in March 2014 to 9% in January 2015. Information provided on the multi-agency referral form (MARF) is mostly good, and notifications of domestic abuse incidents from the police are a particular strength. Details include a risk rating, action taken by the police, which may include referral to other services, and a record of the views of children and young people spoken to by the officers attending. This detailed information supports decision making and planning by children's social care.
39. Good arrangements are in place between the duty and assessment team and hospital maternity services through regular liaison meetings. Pre-birth assessments sampled by inspectors were of good quality and timely. The meetings provide opportunities to identify parents needing additional support or children's social care involvement at an early stage. Examples were seen of cases progressing appropriately to children's social care for assessment, and concerns reducing following the support provided.
40. The duty and assessment team routinely compiles chronologies of family histories to inform assessment and decision making. The quality of chronologies as the case progresses is variable, and history is not consistently used to inform assessment and decision making. A very good use of a chronology was seen to identify a pattern of minor injuries to a young child. This led to an initial child protection case conference and an improvement in the child's circumstances. The team manager described increasing use of chronologies to support planning, and inspectors saw improving reflection by social workers in their practice.

41. Children are seen and seen alone by their social workers who know them well. Social work visits to children and families are proportionate to the level of risk in the case. Social workers describe a range of tools they use to work with children and young people to gather their views and feelings, including 'Three houses' and 'Three islands'. One social worker was able to show inspectors a range of books she uses with children to prompt discussion about their feelings. Another example was seen where a social worker had used drawings to provide a focus for discussion. This had identified significant life events for the young person which she had found difficult to talk about previously. Some children had experienced a number of recent changes in social worker including, in one case, four in 18 months. This had led to drift in this case, and in other cases parents felt unsettled by the changes and said that they had hindered positive working relationships.
42. Warrington has introduced a combined assessment (a single assessment record developed in compliance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013*) to replace initial and core assessments. The quality of combined assessments seen by inspectors ranged from inadequate to good. Six assessments in ten tracked cases did not meet a good standard. This reflects the findings of the local authority's own audits. Assessments that were not good had too narrow a focus on the presenting issue, failed to give sufficient weight to family history in evaluating risk, or were delayed. In some cases, there was over optimism about parents' ability to make and sustain changes. The child's view is evident in most assessments, but this can be superficial and fails to reflect well their lived experience. Six cases were referred by inspectors to the local authority for review because of concerns about the quality of assessment. Prompt action was taken by the authority to address these concerns. Specialist parenting and 'protector' assessments seen were consistently strong. Where assessment is stronger, it is holistic, fully describes the experience of the child and uses research to support the analysis of the case.
43. Social workers have good access to translators to communicate with children, young people and their families. Good attention is given to needs arising out of ethnicity and religion for young people who, for example, have been trafficked, or where there is a risk of honour based violence. However, the individual identity and needs of children in large families are not always explicitly considered in assessments.

44. An effective out-of-hours service is provided by experienced daytime practitioners and managers on a rota, which supports case continuity. Social workers and their managers are informed of events taking place out of office hours by an alert on the electronic case system. Out-of-hours staff conduct planned visits to children and families during the evening and at weekends when this is assessed as necessary as part of the care plan. This provides children and young people with additional support outside office hours, and is valuable in contributing to the assessment process. The out-of-hours service has direct access to the electronic case recording system. Inspectors found that in one instance not enough checks were carried out to determine whether arrangements made for a child were safe following a mother's emergency admission to hospital. The local authority promptly re-issued guidance to staff on the importance of conducting thorough record checks.
45. There is strong, focused multi-agency support for children with disabilities. The Local Offer for children and young people with additional needs was published in September 2014, and was prepared utilising excellent consultation with a variety of stakeholders. The offer is comprehensive and covers all of the areas that the integrated service deals with. However, the first port of call for most carers and young people is through the website, and this is currently not easy to use. Navigation is confusing and includes some jargon that does not help parents to understand the services available or where to go for help, support and advice. The local authority is aware of this problem and is redesigning the website with a re-launch planned for May this year.
46. The number of children made subject to police powers of protection has risen significantly from 11 in 2013–14 to 20 in the first three quarters of 2014–15. At the time the children were made subject to police powers it was appropriate and necessary to do so. All cases seen by inspectors had a substantial history of children's social care and police involvement, and five were currently in crisis. The impact of this is that children were moved to other family members or into foster care as an emergency, without preparation and in an unplanned way. The local authority has not yet reviewed these cases to identify any learning.

47. There were 219 open child protection cases at the point of inspection. This has increased from 170 in published data as of 31 March 2014. The local authority has a good understanding of where child protection plans have a risk factor of neglect, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or mental health problems. Extensive awareness raising by the LSCB and the local authority has had a significant and positive impact on the number of children and young people identified as suffering neglect. The proportion of children in Warrington subject to a child protection plan under this category has risen from 38% in 2013–14 to 64% in quarter three of 2014–15. Neglect is now the largest category for children who are subject to a plan. Domestic abuse featured in 49% (190) of all child protection plans between April and December 2014. Parental mental health problems were a presenting factor in 29% (115) of child protection plans between April and December 2014. In 31% (123) of cases, alcohol abuse was the presenting issue, and in 24% (94) of cases, parental drug abuse was a feature. In 4% of child protection plans, all elements of the 'toxic trio' of domestic violence, parental substance misuse and mental ill-health were present.
48. A caseload weighting system takes into account the complexity of each case. Caseloads in the duty and assessment team and children in need teams are manageable, with the highest seen consisting of 24 children.
49. Responsive and well planned services are in place to meet local needs. There is effective partnership working between children's social care and adults' services such as community psychiatric nurses and adult drugs and alcohol services. Investment by the domestic abuse partnership in services for children and parents has had a positive effect in increasing the availability of services such as the independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) to children, young people and their families. A voluntary scheme for perpetrators of domestic abuse, commissioned last year, gives priority to families with children on a child protection or child in need plan. The first cohort of 14 adults, representing seven families, has shown good success, with 86% of perpetrators reported not to have carried out further acts of abuse to date. Children are benefiting from this approach, with the level of risk reducing in five families and resulting in step down from the public law outline process (PLO) or removal from child protection plans. Operation Relentless, a Cheshire Police initiative, works with repeat domestic abuse offenders, and is currently being piloted with 12 perpetrators in Warrington. Although in its early stages, there is already evidence of initial impact in one family with children subject to a child protection plan. Operation Encompass is also being piloted in Warrington, and provides prompt information to children's schools following an incident of domestic abuse.

50. The local authority has responded to the increase in children subject to a child protection plan by appointing an additional child protection chair on an interim basis. This has had a positive impact on the timeliness of initial and review conferences. In January 2015, 18 of the 19 children subject to initial child protection case conferences had their meeting held within timescales; 95% of review case conferences are within timescales in the year to date; and parental attendance at conferences is good, with parents or carers attending 100% of conferences held in January. Training completed with GPs had a positive effect on increasing the number and quality of the reports provided to case conferences. However, this has slipped more recently, with only 52 out of 111 invitations resulting in a report being provided to conference. In quarter three of 2014–15, the children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHs) has not provided any reports to child protection case conferences where they have been invited to do so. This hinders robust planning for children and young people.
51. Child protection conferences observed by inspectors were sensitively chaired. There was good multi-agency attendance and ownership of the plan. Although not all child protection plans are clear and outcome focused, some good examples were seen, and parents spoken to by inspectors understand what needs to change. Core groups are held regularly, with good attendance by a range of partner agencies. Examples were seen of plans having a positive impact in effecting change for children. In one instance, children were able to remain with their parents with an appropriate range of services provided, including support from the adult learning difficulties service. In another case, a comprehensive parenting assessment identified relevant history of neglect and parental mental ill-health. This led to a timely move to proceedings and children being placed in foster care.
52. The number of children receiving support from an independent advocate to attend or give their views to a child protection case conference remains low at 20, although this is an increase from nine in 2013–14. The low number of children receiving independent support is a lost opportunity to ensure that their voice is clearly and explicitly represented in their meetings and plans. This can also reduce an understanding of children's experiences.
53. The system in place for child protection chairs to identify, track and escalate issues is not yet sufficiently robust. Priority recommendations made by conference chairs are not consistently leading to swift remedial action by managers. In three of five cases seen by inspectors, action including progression to legal gateway planning meetings had been avoidably delayed, thereby impeding progress. Challenge and recommendations made by chairs are applied on a case-by-case basis rather than being collated and analysed to improve the quality of practice across the service.

54. Children's case records demonstrate regular management discussion and oversight, but this does not always translate into swift and decisive action. The Legal Gateway Panel (LGP) has appropriately identified and taken action where there has been drift or delay in child protection cases progressing to the panel and in cases where the threshold has been agreed for issuing proceedings. However, these children have experienced delay in the progression of plans to safeguard them when the threshold for significant harm has been met.
55. Recent steps have been taken to ensure that where children are assessed as no longer being at risk of significant harm they continue to be supported by child in need plans. These cases are regularly reviewed at well attended review meetings. This has not yet had an impact on reducing the number of children subject to a second child protection plan, which has continued to increase to 29% at the end of quarter three. However, this figure includes children who have been made subject to a plan at any time in the past. The proportion of children subject to a second plan within two years is 14%, and within three years is 17%. This performance is closer to statistical neighbours at 13.4% and England at 15.8%.
56. Effective systems ensure that the local authority is quickly aware of children who are missing education (18 at the time of inspection). The authority receives a range of information from partners to make sure that children are identified. The monthly pupil out of school monitoring meetings (POOSM) are well attended by a wide range of agencies, and there are clear links made between child sexual exploitation and children who are missing. The local authority is persistent in ensuring that children are accurately identified and school places found. Live birth data are used within the early help division to check if children take up nursery places, and this information is used by the school admissions team to cross check applications for school places. All Warrington children (22) who are not receiving 25 hours of education or are at risk of exclusion are carefully monitored by the vulnerable pupils' team. This ensures that alternative education is provided quickly and additional support is provided for schools where children are at risk of exclusion.
57. The local authority provides an effective service to support children in receipt of elective home education (EHE). This service is led by Warrington and shared with four other authorities (Cheshire West and Chester, Knowsley, Liverpool, and Wirral). Currently, 46 children are home educated, and this figure remains broadly stable each year. During 2014, there were 16 new cases and 10 returned successfully to mainstream education. This is because the local authority works with families to consider the appropriateness of home education, helps to resolve any conflicts with schools, and finds alternative placements to encourage children to return to school. In 2014, 24 out of 25 known families provided evidence to assure the authority that the education for their child is suitable.

58. Concerted campaigning to raise awareness of private fostering has not resulted in an increase in the number of cases known. Of five such arrangements in place during the last year, three were assessed within timescales, with timely, appropriate and regular support delivered in line with regulation. In one of the cases, the work was of particularly good quality, with the local authority progressing to permanence through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). In two cases there was significant delay in completing the assessment and management sign-off.
59. Arrangements for assessing the circumstances of homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are insufficiently robust. Of 36 young people who presented as homeless in the last year, outcomes for nine were not known and a number of other short-term temporary living arrangements described by young people were not followed up before case closure. Although procedures are appropriately followed in the majority of cases the absence of follow-up in these cases means that the local authority cannot be assured about young people's safety and well-being.
60. The local authority and LSCB have provided extensive training to social workers, schools and other children's practitioners in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and children missing. This includes awareness raising with young people through a theatre production for schools, 'Risking it All'. 61 young people were identified as at risk in 2013–14, a 43% increase on the previous year. Currently five young people are subject of risk management plans, three are subject to child protection plans, 12 are subject to child in need plans and 11 are subject to CAFs. However, the CSE screening tool is not consistently used and local procedures are not always followed by social workers and managers. For example, in one case there was delay in convening a risk management meeting following a strategy discussion, and in another, section 47 enquiries should have been instigated but were not
61. Where children are missing from home, return interviews are conducted by a local service commissioned by the Cheshire local authorities to support children and young people who go missing. Return interviews were completed in the majority of cases (21 out of 26 in the last quarter). Examples of persistent work to engage with young people have resulted in the reduction of missing episodes for some children.
62. The Missing, Child Sexual Exploitation, Trafficked Operational Group (MCSETO) is an effective forum for information sharing, and has led to targeted disruption work including Operation Macerata, a joint police and social care investigation. This has resulted in individuals being charged and criminal proceedings were underway at the time of the inspection. Multi-agency disruption work has led to the closure of one take-away food outlet and the prosecution of out-of-area taxi drivers operating in Warrington. Between May 2013 and September 2014, 21 abduction notices were issued against male and female perpetrators.

63. Good arrangements are in place for considering the protection of children who live in households where there is significant risk of domestic abuse. A multi-agency partnership, led by police and supported by regular attendance of children's services representatives, carefully considers children's circumstances. All cases considered by the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) are appropriately and routinely risk assessed by the police or the IDVA. Any subsequent assessment by children's services is suitably detailed and focused on the presenting risks.
64. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) deals effectively with concerns or allegations of harm against professionals or volunteers who work with children and young people. Cases seen show good consideration of children's safety, such as a suitably in-depth combined assessment of an alleged perpetrator's own children with differentiated child protection plans in place.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>There is a strong commitment by senior leaders and elected members to children in care.</p> <p>The vast majority of children who become looked after in Warrington have their needs met, and their outcomes improve when removal from parental care is unavoidable. Legal permanence is secured swiftly when cases proceed through the family court. Care proceedings are concluding within 23 to 24 weeks which is better than the national average of 29 weeks.</p> <p>A high proportion of children and young people are placed in foster care within the local authority and are close to home. This increases the opportunity for children to remain at their current school and reduces disruption to their routines. It also means that contact between children and their family and friends can be better promoted and supported.</p> <p>An excellent service is provided to children in care who are placed out of the area, irrespective of distance.</p> <p>The educational outcomes for children looked after are better than those for looked after children nationally. The attainment gap between looked after children and all Warrington children is closing. Children and young people’s health needs are effectively promoted and outcomes are good.</p> <p>Multi-agency action to prevent looked after young people offending and re-offending is good. Performance has improved over the past twelve months and is now better than comparators.</p> <p>Children are being placed with their adoptive families in a timely way. Adoption plans and care proceedings are being concluded on average at 24 weeks, reflecting a determined and effective approach to achieving permanence plans at the earliest opportunity. The local authority has a sufficient number of adopters through a partnership arrangement with two other local authorities (WWiSH), which provides choice and stability for children and enables them to be appropriately matched with their forever families.</p> <p>Warrington keeps in touch with all its care leavers, providing careful attention to their pathway planning and transition to independent living. The gap in the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment and training compared with their non-looked after peers is substantially reducing.</p>	

65. At the time of inspection, 294 children and young people were being looked after by Warrington Council. This number has increased from 234 in March 2014. The age profile and reasons for becoming looked after largely reflect the authority's significant focus on the area of neglect. The impact has been an appropriate and proportionate rise in the number of children becoming looked after. Decisions to look after children are made in their best interests. In the vast majority of cases, clear, knowledge-based assessments underpin these decisions unless in an emergency or crisis.
66. The Legal Gateway Panel (LGP) is chaired by a senior manager, who robustly ensures that focused decisions are made and that all alternatives to care are fully explored before legal proceedings are issued. A further strength of the panel is the arrangement to review those cases where children are looked after on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. These arrangements are ensuring that legal permanence is routinely considered and drift is avoided.
67. The Public Law Outline (PLO) is well embedded. The LGP identifies where there is drift and delay within child protection cases progressing to PLO, and where care proceedings are not progressing in a timely way. In a small number of cases seen in pre-proceedings (5 of 79), remedial actions were not completed swiftly. This meant these children experienced delay in the progression of their plans. Consequently, the local authority has identified a need to improve practice in pre-proceedings, with particular regard to the assessment of parental capacity and when to take authoritative action when parents are unable to achieve and sustain change within the child's timescale. As a result, a series of workshops and training have commenced, targeted at frontline staff and their managers.
68. Letters before proceedings are well written. The threshold for issuing proceedings is clear and understood. Robust legal advice is provided to the LGP, staff and managers. When cases proceed through the family court, legal permanence is secured swiftly. Care proceedings are concluding within 23 to 24 weeks, which is better than the national average of 29 weeks. This has been achieved through robust tracking and monitoring arrangements through the LGP and through effective relationships between the local authority, CAFCASS and the Judiciary. As a result, children and young people benefit from efficient progress through legal proceedings.
69. Where children and young people return home from care in a planned way, timely assessments give good consideration to the safety of those arrangements and ensure that sufficient support and contingency planning are in place. However, where these arrangements are unplanned, assessments are typically delayed, leaving children without appropriate levels of support.
70. Despite the challenges of a significant rise in the number of children in care, the authority is meeting the requirements of the sufficiency duty.

71. Warrington has 107 fostering households caring for 169 children. At the time of inspection, there were seven placements available for younger children in foster homes. In the year to date, 14 new carers have been recruited and two more are expected to be approved at the March 2015 panel. However, there have been 16 resignations or retirements and this means that the authority's published target of a net increase of 10 new carers per year for three years from 2014 is not met. Recruitment is hampered by the lack of a marketing strategy for the next year and an unfilled vacancy of a dedicated recruitment officer. Firm plans are now in place to recruit to this post.
72. Training, supervision and support to foster carers are good quality and are aiding retention. Foster carers say that Warrington is a good place to foster and good information is shared with them prior to a child going to live with them. Caseloads within the fostering service are manageable and enable good supervision and support to all carers. Fostering social workers are supported to effectively match children by a locally developed matching system that promotes best fit when children are identified as needing foster care. The fostering panel has an experienced membership and is well chaired. It meets with sufficient regularity and there has been improvement in the quality of assessments with the introduction of the Fostering Network materials, which offer a more focused insight into potential carers' skills.
73. A high proportion of looked after children and young people are placed in local authority foster care within the borough. Only 7% of children are placed more than 20 miles away. This is significantly better than comparators and the England average at 17% and 38% respectively. This increases the opportunity for children to remain at their current school and reduces disruption to children's routines. It also means that contact between children and their family and friends can be better promoted and supported.
74. In spite of the challenges to increase the number of in house foster carers, great care is taken to find the most appropriate placement. Of the 308 children in care, only 15% are placed in external fostering provision. Where children are placed in external placements which meet their needs, there is no pressure to return them to in-house placements. Decisions are not resource led, but made in the child's best interests.
75. The number of children who have experienced three or more placements has reduced slightly, from 10.3% to 9.2% between March 2014 and January 2015 and still remains better than comparators. The Placement Support and Contact Service offer specific support to challenging placements. Disruption meetings occurred on five occasions in the year 2013–14 prior to placements breaking down. This is good practice. The local authority learns from its evaluation of disrupted placements, and has identified that intervention to support placements needs to take place earlier.

76. The quality of assessments to determine whether siblings should live together or separately varies across teams and the rationale for these decisions is recorded in a variety of documents, typically within court statements. A lack of clear recording about the quality of sibling relationships makes it difficult to understand how these decisions are made.
77. The local authority has six children's homes, three of which were judged good by Ofsted at their last inspections and three outstanding. Rigorous arrangements are in place to monitor the care of children and young people who are in external placements. No residential or foster care placements have been commissioned from independent agencies that have been judged to be less than good in recent Ofsted inspections. The authority is an established partner in the regional network and framework for commissioning for children looked after. The commissioning process is effectively monitored through, for example, feedback from social workers, IROs and reports from other professionals.
78. The number of looked after children placed at home with parents has increased significantly from 1 (6%) to 28 (9.5%) since April 2014. This is higher than comparators (2%) and the England average (5%). The vast majority of decisions for children to be placed at home are based on clear, risk-based assessments when care proceedings have been completed. In a small number of cases children have remained with their mother as the court has not supported a plan of removal. This was despite the authority's robust challenge and supporting evidence that the threshold for significant harm was met. This is an area of ongoing discussion with the Local Family Justice Board and neighbouring authorities.
79. The local authority's family and friends policies are clear and appropriately focus on securing family placements where appropriate. There is evidence of early consideration of the potential for permanency with family or non-kinship carers, including foster carers, within the pre-proceedings processes. Where a family placement is not possible, placements with other people connected with the child are considered in a timely way. Viability assessments are appropriately undertaken, and if approved they are well supported by the provision of practical and financial arrangements.
80. Where children are unable to return to the care of their parents, Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders are promoted. In the year ending March 2014, one Child Arrangement Order was made. There has been an increase in children leaving care subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) from eight at the end of March 2014 to 12 at the end of January 2015. Six of these SGOs were made to foster carers and six to family members. In all cases, appropriate financial support arrangements are in place. All cases also have practical support plans, but there was insufficient information about how to manage contact arrangements with birth families.

81. There are currently 185 children receiving good quality, targeted short breaks through the integrated service for children with disabilities. Help is provided in line with good assessments, enabling families to address the challenges of additional needs through use of targeted services. Good systems are in place for the use of the direct payments system, which is very well embedded, enabling parents and carers to be in control of the support plans for their children.
82. All children and young people looked after have an allocated social worker. There is sufficient capacity within the teams, but one children in care team has experienced a high turnover of staff in the past five months. This includes the loss of four permanent social workers and one principal manager. This has affected consistency of social worker for children and the development of trusting relationships. For example, one child said that they had three changes of social worker in a four-month period. All social workers who spoke to inspectors knew children and young people well and demonstrated a real passion and commitment to improving their outcomes and making children safe. One child told an inspector that her social worker is like a friend and she could tell her anything.
83. The majority of statutory visits are timely, and social workers work with children directly to understand their wishes and feelings and the quality of their placement. Visits to children who live outside the local authority area are regular irrespective of distance, and support provided is of a consistently good standard. For example, a child living in the East of England was visited six times in a three-month period, which is good practice. Social workers are clear about the outcomes they are working towards, although this is not always reflected in written records. Not all placement information records and care plans are routinely updated following children's reviews or when children's circumstances change. This makes it difficult to see the longer term plan for the child and how this will be achieved. Records of statutory visits do not consistently demonstrate the direct work undertaken with children. While ethnicity is recorded, the wider impact of equality and diversity issues is not always fully explored.
84. Children in care benefit from good access to advocacy and independent visitor services provided through the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS). There is no waiting list for advocacy services, with 83 children being supported during proceedings in the last reporting year. There are currently 13 young people matched with independent visitors and receiving support, which is an increase from seven last year, and there are currently seven young people reported as waiting to be matched, with an average wait of eight to ten weeks. The complaints manager has increased the level of engagement with social work teams, IROs and children's homes, to raise awareness of the complaints process. Children's complaints are discussed at performance meetings and cascaded to social work teams to aid learning and prevent repetition of avoidable problems. Individual examples of children influencing service delivery include remaining in their choice of placement.

85. Performance on the timeliness of children in care reviews is very good, with 99% of reviews completed within timescales. IROs actively seek evidence of permanence decisions being made by the child's second review. There is evidence that IROs have taken robust action to escalate matters to managers where there is delay in children's plans, although in some cases without sufficient impact. In a small number of cases, delay continued because remedial actions identified had not been followed up by social workers and managers. Children are seen by their IRO prior to their review in the vast majority of cases. IROs actively encourage children and young people to participate and this has resulted in some children chairing their own reviews. Children's views about improving service delivery are actively sought through the review process.
86. Multi-agency action to prevent looked after young people offending and re-offending is good.
87. There has been improved information sharing and accountability between agencies and within the local authority in response to children missing from care and where children are at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Between April 2014 and February 2015, 26 children went missing from care. All of them were offered return home interviews with a commissioned local service, and the majority accepted the interview. There were four children who refused, and in these cases alternative visits were offered or social workers followed this up. Looked after children placed in Warrington by other local authorities receive the same protective service.
88. Social workers receive copies of all return home interviews as part of assessing risk. The local commissioned organisation that undertakes these provides quarterly reports to MCSETO (missing children, children at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficked children operational group) which feeds into a wider multi-agency analysis of patterns, trends and intelligence. However, in one case inspectors identified that missing procedures were not robustly followed for a young person living outside the area. Opportunities were missed to escalate the case to MCSETO and to interrogate the findings from missing episodes to inform the child's safety plan. The authority took immediate and appropriate action when notified of this by inspectors. The child's circumstances have been reviewed and senior managers have reissued the procedures for out of area placements to all managers and social workers.

89. Where CSE is a known or a potential risk factor, the child sexual exploitation assessment tool is not consistently used despite very clear procedures and targeted training provided to social workers and managers. Some good examples were seen by inspectors of positive impact where risk had been significantly reduced in cases of young people at risk of or suffering CSE. However, in five cases seen by inspectors, including three where children have been discussed at MCSETO, this has not informed the individual safety plans for children. In two cases, the CSE tool had not been used where CSE was a known risk. Further scrutiny of files identified that safety work was on-going; however this was not recorded in the child's plan. This makes it difficult to measure progress and reduces accountability.
90. The corporate parenting panel has clear priorities and aspirations for young people in Warrington. There are effective links with partner agencies, who share their focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. Corporate parents have contributed to maintaining and improving the educational attainments and health of looked after children and young people. The virtual school keeps a close check on the educational achievements of looked after children, and monitors their attendance to make sure that they attend school regularly. Improved systems to monitor attendance, and focused action taken, have resulted in a reduction in the level of children who are persistently absent, from 14% in 2012-13 to 6.7% in 2013-14. Attendance is currently at 94%, which is slightly below the attendance of all Warrington children at 95%.
91. There have been no permanent exclusions of looked after children by Warrington for 12 years, and fixed term exclusions continue to reduce significantly, for example from 12.9% in the academic year 2010-11 to 5% in year 2012-13. The reduction in fixed term exclusions is due to the virtual school working directly with schools to provide additional support when children are identified as at risk of exclusion or are known to be especially vulnerable. On occasions when alternative provision is needed, this is provided by tailored packages that include attendance at the pupil referral unit, one-to-one tuition and/or on-line learning. This ensures that children who become looked after, or have a disruption in their schooling, continue to receive full time education. No children who are looked after are missing from education.
92. The quality of personal educational plans (PEPs) is improving steadily, but still needs work to achieve consistently good standards. In seven out of 11 PEPs sampled, targets lack detail and do not include measureable success criteria, which the local authority recognises from its own monthly quality assurance. In the large majority (73%) of PEPs the child's view is captured well, with a couple of examples of the child's voice ringing out clearly. Since September 2014, PEPs are required to be completed termly and include requests for pupil premium spend. It is too early to show the impact of the pupil premium on the children's attainment, but the better PEPs identify how pupil premium is to be used and how its impact is measured.

93. The virtual school closely tracks the progress of children in care in order to ensure that they receive support to make at least expected progress from their starting points. The outcomes for looked after children at the end of primary school are better than the nationally established level for looked after children, and the attainment gap between looked after children and all Warrington children is closing. In 2014, 60% of children reached level 4 in reading, writing and maths compared to 83% of their peers. This means the gap has reduced from 28% in 2012 to 23% in 2014. The book scheme that was introduced for children in Key Stage 2 in 2014 has helped to accelerate children's learning, with 90% of children making expected progress in reading. This has now been extended to Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 4 to promote home learning across all stages of education.
94. The current performance of children looked after achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths) declined from 25% in 2013 to 16% in 2014, but this was in line with the target set by the local authority for this cohort of children (a small cohort and a high number of children with special educational needs). Despite this decline, children looked after in Warrington continue to perform slightly better (3%) than statistical neighbours and 4% better than the national average. Additional support and tuition is in place to help three young people who narrowly missed getting their predicted grades to prepare for resits.
95. The large majority (65%) of children looked after go to a school judged good or outstanding at the last Ofsted inspection. The virtual school looks carefully to see if a change of school is required when a pupil at a school not yet good comes into care or if a school is subsequently judged less than good. The virtual school works in partnership with the school improvement team and provides additional support, such as additional pupil premium, where children are placed in a school that is not good. A total of 13 children are currently attending inadequate schools. The individual circumstances and specific needs of each child are fully considered when deciding if a change of school is needed. Where a child/young person is not making expected progress this leads to a change of school. A change of school is currently underway for two children where a deadline for the school to improve was not met.
96. Children and young people's health needs are effectively promoted and outcomes are good. The co-location of the specialist looked after nurse with social workers helps to ensure a coordinated approach to children and young people's care plans. The majority of health reviews are completed within timescales, an improvement from 88.3% at the end of March 2014 to 89.6% in March 2015. Performance on arranging up-to-date dental checks has also improved, with 85.5% of the cohort having had a check in the past 12 months compared with 80% at the end of March 2014.

97. There is good support to promote emotional well-being through the increased use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs). The outcomes of SDQs are monitored by the specialist nurse, who supports social workers to identify appropriate service responses. There is, however, no overall evaluation of the findings to identify service gaps or service development. Foster carers and local authority residential staff are well supported by the specialist nurse, who has recently provided training to develop their understanding of how to support children and young people who self-harm. Any looked after child who presents with emotional or mental health difficulties is quickly assessed by the in-house CAMHs service. Young people who require more intensive or specialist support receive appropriate treatment, with average waiting times to access treatment being good at between two and four weeks.
98. Only five young people in care are reported as having a substance misuse problem. The authority is aware that this number is low and that there is likely to be under reporting by social workers. Work is underway to raise social workers' awareness of the need to record in assessments where substance misuse is a factor, to ensure that children and young people receive the right service. In addition, this will help the authority and its partners to measure prevalence and better inform service planning.
99. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) and its junior version the '3Cs' are well established and highly valued. Regular meetings and events are well facilitated by enthusiastic staff, who promote children and young people to have their say about all levels of the service. Events are well attended and help to give the children and young people a genuine influence as well as enjoyment. Initiatives such as the music group, currently funded through the virtual school, allow children in care to feel valued and celebrated, and were very well regarded by the enthusiastic group of 11 children and young people who met with inspectors. The awards ceremony in December 2014 was attended by over 200 children, young people, carers, staff and elected members. Certificates and letters of encouragement were shared proudly with inspectors and allowed CiCC members to reflect positively on their impact on service improvement, for example, their work with the virtual school on bullying and delivering training to foster carers on children and young people's emotional well-being when they first become looked after.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good

100. Children and young people who may benefit from adoption are identified early. Effective case tracking through care proceedings ensures that family finding processes begin early and subsequent placements with adopters are timely. This is helped by the local authority having sufficient adopters through partnership arrangements with two other local authorities, which ensures good choice for children and enables placements to be supported locally.

101. At the point of inspection 22 children were awaiting adoption. Of these, 16 are placed with adopters and six children are yet to be formally matched, although adoptive families have been identified for five out of the six at the point of inspection. Active family finding continues for the other child.
102. Positive action has been taken by the local authority in April 2014 to bring the local authority child care social workers back into Warrington's own adoption service from management by WWiSH. This followed a partnership arrangement between Warrington, Wigan and St Helens in 2011 to establish a shared adoption service. This decision has helped to ensure that plans for children are progressed without unnecessary drift and although there are still relatively few social workers with extensive adoption experience, their skills are being cascaded through the wider workforce to good effect, demonstrated by good quality child permanence reports.
103. The WWiSH arrangements that remain unaffected by these changes are also having a positive impact on improving adoption performance. For example, 79 adopters were recruited during 2013–14 and the partnership expects to have approved a further 56 in 2014–15. These numbers reflect targeted recruitment for early permanence and for sibling groups, and are more than sufficient to meet the needs of children with adoption plans in Warrington.
104. The three-year adoption scorecard does not reflect current good practice in the service, which over the last year has achieved significantly better outcomes for children. The adoption service performance against the national scorecard is affected by some legacy cases which reflect practice dating back to when the local authority was judged to be inadequate at an Ofsted inspection in 2009. The local authority believes it will be a further 12 to 18 months before the adoption scorecard shows improvement to take account of more timely adoptions now being achieved.
105. Warrington's performance on the average time between a child moving into care and moving in with its adoptive family (for those adopted) has improved slightly from 679 days to 653 as at January 2015. This improvement has coincided with the DfE setting a more challenging national target. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for the nine children adopted in 2014–15, is only 18 days longer than the revised national target and demonstrates marked improvement against the three-year average adoption scorecard targets. This improvement is supported by improved timescales for the completion of care proceedings and a concerted push to more timely family finding for children, along with a high number of adoptive families available from WWiSH.
106. The average time between receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match is improving, but remains longer than the England average. This is still a priority area for improvement.

107. Social workers spoken with demonstrate good knowledge about the children they are supporting, their background histories and developmental needs. Decisions taken by managers and social workers are child centred and undertaken in timescales to ensure that children are appropriately prepared for and matched well to their adoptive families. However sibling assessments are not always completed. The overall effectiveness of this work is endorsed by the fact that there have been no disruptions of adoption placements during the last year.
108. The agency decision maker (ADM) is sufficiently senior, and makes balanced decisions as to whether adoption is the most appropriate permanence plan for the child. The local authority is strengthening its procedures for decision making to change plans away from adoption. In future this will be undertaken by the ADM rather than direct line managers. However, only one plan for adoption has been overturned in the last year, at the direction of the court. The WWiSH adoption panel is chaired by a knowledgeable and experienced independent chairperson. The adoption panels are always quorate due to having sufficient experienced members available from a central list, which ensures capacity for three panels to meet monthly. Panel minutes are produced to a good standard and record well the discussions held and the recommendations made. Those that inspectors reviewed as part of the inspection showed the agency decision maker's decisions to be properly detailed and well reasoned.
109. Prospective adopter records evidence appropriate vetting checks being completed to establish the suitability of applicants, including references and stage one and two plans. Prospective adopter reports and children's permanence reports are produced to consistently good standards. The reports evidence what adopters have to offer a child, their attributes, skills and how they will parent a child with a challenging background.
110. No Warrington child has experienced an adoption disruption within the last 12 months. Where this has occurred for a child in the other local authorities within the WWiSH partnership, minutes of the adoption disruption meeting were shared at panel. This enabled lessons to be learned to improve practice.
111. The adoption team and the WWiSH partnership demonstrate an inclusive approach to adoption. This is illustrated by the profile of adopters and the evident commitment to attract a diverse range of adopters to meet the needs of the children for whom the local authority is responsible. This includes same sex couples, single carers and adopters from the age of 20 to 60. Although predominantly a white British population, one child from a minority ethnic heritage has been suitably placed and no minority ethnic children are currently awaiting adoption.

112. The majority of Warrington's children with a plan for adoption have been placed with WWiSH adopters, which reflects the strength of the partnership arrangement. The remainder have secured placements through the Adopt North West consortium or voluntary adoption agencies. Local placements allow children to be supported more effectively by workers with detailed knowledge of local resources, that can be accessed as additional services to support children post-placement. The average time in 2014–15 from approval as adopters to being matched is 3.1 months, which demonstrates good performance. Those adopters and children who do not secure matches are referred to the adoption register. The service currently has 19 adopters waiting to be matched.
113. All adopters are provided with a good quality information pack as part of the recruitment process. This includes details of support and entitlements available to them pre- and post-adoption. Adopters spoken with were very positive about WWiSH at all stages of their adoption journey. They were particularly complimentary about their WWiSH social worker, with one adopter commenting 'it's a very intrusive process, but not done in an intrusive way'. All adopters spoken to felt the assessment process was done at the right pace and in an informative manner, including being prepared in advance for the following home study session. Although a small number of adopters felt support was lacking from the child's social worker when their child was placed, all would recommend the adoption service, and thought the children were prepared as well as could be expected at the point of placement.
114. The local authority does not currently have any children placed with the three early permanency carers who are prepared to foster a baby or young child during care proceedings before proceeding to adopt should the court grant a placement order. The WWiSH partnership is running a targeted recruitment campaign to promote fostering to adopt through which children can be placed with their potential permanent carers at an earlier stage. It is also targeting recruitment of adopters who are able to care for more than one child, so that brothers and sisters can stay together.
115. The local authority recognises that it needs to do more to improve the quality and timeliness of life story book completion. Last year, foster carers received training in life story work, which is positive and reinforces its importance in helping children to preserve their memories. The books include relevant birth history information and personal information about the child's interests, but they are not consistently prepared in accordance with the agreed format and are in a style which makes them less engaging for children. Some examples that were seen during the inspection contained narrative that would be more relevant to include in later life letters.

116. The two later life letters seen by inspectors were not easily understandable to a child; they read like a report and included professional language, rather than plain English. On a more positive note, one letter recognised the sensitivity of the issues shared in the letter, alerting the child to this at the beginning so that they could seek support at the point of reading.
117. Adoption support services are valued by adopters, and 18 families are currently receiving support provided by the WWiSH partnership. This includes a programme to promote therapeutic play techniques to enable the relationship between the child and the adopters to be built. Therapeutic parenting courses are available, which also enable adopters to derive support from the experience of other adopters facing similar issues. These services are widely available and adoptive families take up courses when they are required.
118. The quality of post adoption support sampled is inconsistent, with support tending to be focused on single issues rather than the child's holistic needs. Plans do not have measurable, outcome-focused targets and none of the cases have been reviewed to consider the impact of support provided. No case supervision was recorded on any of the children's files, although reference to specific cases was made in the social worker's supervision file. The local authority commissions an appropriate service for birth parents, and a dedicated worker facilitates letter box contact when appropriate and possible. During 2013–14, 100 contacts were supported by the service.

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

119. Warrington Borough Council keeps in good touch with all its care leavers, providing careful attention to their pathway planning and transition to independent living. The gap in the numbers of care leavers who are in education, employment and training compared with their non-looked after peers is substantially reducing.
120. Warrington has 70 care leavers over the age of 18, and 20 eligible young people aged between 16 and 18 years. Most of these young people live in Warrington, with only 19 residing outside the local authority boundary.
121. Warrington does not have a separate Leaving Care Service. Personal Advisers have dual roles as Social Work Assistants, providing contact supervision to children who are the subject of proceedings or of Care Orders with supervised contact requirements. Caseload weighting reflects this workload division, and Personal Advisers have manageable numbers of young people allocated to them. A restructuring programme creating a dedicated Leaving Care Service will be implemented in the summer of 2015. This is intended to strengthen service provision, allowing Personal Advisers to assist in the implementation of improvement priorities set in the Care Leavers' Strategy.

122. Care Leavers spoken to appreciate the support and dedication of their Personal Advisers. They particularly value the consistent, long-serving staff team, which enables them to build trusting professional relationships. They described their Personal Advisers as going 'beyond the call of duty' in offering support and guidance.
123. All Care Leavers are provided with Pathway Plans from the age of 16 years and three months. These are updated twice a year. Pathway Plan Reviews for care leavers over 18 years are not, however, reviewed with the oversight of a qualified social worker.
124. The majority of Pathway Plans seen were effective. They contained comprehensive, salient information about young people, including their income, accommodation, education, employment, training and health outcomes; objectives were clear, with detailed, accountable actions and well considered contingency plans. Young people's practical needs were carefully documented and timely responses provided.
125. Some plans seen by inspectors were less effective in describing young people's emotional wellbeing, particularly amongst the majority of care leavers who live independently, whose good emotional health and stability is particularly important to coping with the demands of independence. This is further compounded by insufficient management information on care leavers with greater vulnerabilities, including those with substance misuse problems or mental health difficulties. A small proportion of Pathway Plans seen were not specific enough in addressing young people's health needs, and were too dependent on young people to make appointments and access services.
126. Transition planning for young people with complex needs is effective, and has benefited from extensive consultation with young people and their parents. Personal Advisers work jointly with young people's Social Workers from the age of 16 to 18 to ensure that their Pathway Plans are rigorous. Twenty-five care leavers, representing about a third of those eligible, are tracked from the age of 15 years to ensure sufficient planning time for smooth transitions to adult services. A commissioning process is in preparation to provide additional 'wrap around' services in education, health and care for young people aged 16 years and over.
127. Transition planning to adult services is largely effective. A Looked After Children (LAC) Nurse works with looked after children and young people up to 18 years of age, but no dedicated service is available to older care leavers. There are two specialist looked after CAMHS posts, assisting navigation of some young people with complex mental health needs into adult mental health services, but pathways for care leavers with additional emotional and mental health difficulties that do not meet adult thresholds are currently underdeveloped. Individual risks concerning offending and substance misuse are known and understood by Personal Advisers, but the availability of additional services to support more vulnerable care leavers is patchy.

128. Young people are signposted by the LAC nurse and their Personal Advisers to sexual health and substance misuse services as required. Care leavers are not currently provided with a health passport or summary of their health histories, and young people spoken to stated that they would find this helpful. There is a commitment to implement health summaries by June 2015.
129. Most eligible young people aged between 16 and 18 years are provided with planned, structured preparation for independence training. This is provided by Personal Advisers, who offer group programmes on key aspects of preparation, bolstered by four supported and semi-independent housing providers who offer independence preparation as a core component of their contract specifications. Provision of continuing independence preparation to young people aged 18 years and over is less robust, as the majority of older care leavers reside in independent settings with limited or no additional support packages supplied. Some care leavers said that they would have welcomed more independence training phased over a longer period.
130. Almost all care leavers (97%) live in suitable accommodation. Two care leavers are living in unsuitable accommodation. These are both short term arrangements and Personal Advisers are working with these care leavers to help find suitable permanent accommodation. Thirteen young people have remained with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements and there is a strategic objective to increase this number.
131. The majority of care leavers aged 18 and over live in independent accommodation offered in the private rented sector or through social housing nominations. No care leavers reported feeling unsafe in their accommodation or are housed in high crime hotspot areas of Warrington. There is an emerging commissioning programme to expand the range of supported housing providers, both for young people aged 16 to 18 years, and older care leavers. Currently, four providers are commissioned through a framework arrangement with a regional commissioning consortium, providing thirteen placements for young people aged 16 to 18. There are no young people placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and only four care leavers over 18 years (5%) live in houses of multiple occupancy, and are appropriately assessed to do so.
132. The number of children looked after and care leavers aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training is improving, and the gap between them and all Warrington young people is closing quickly. The gap has decreased from 5.6% in March 2012 to 4.2% in March 2014. In March 2012, 28.6% of young people looked after and care leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This has reduced significantly to 8.2% in March 2014, reflecting the targeted approach by the Careers for Young People Service. This team sits alongside the virtual school, providing well-coordinated monitoring and support to children in care and care leavers in Warrington and those placed out of the area.

133. Effective targeting is further achieved through prioritising services with a range of partners through the NEET strategy group and improving participation group. The Careers for Young people Service, which became an in-house service in 2012, keeps a close track on all students, particularly care leavers who are a priority group, providing lists to schools of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.
134. The local authority is making good progress with care leavers remaining in education, employment and training. Of care leavers aged 19 to 21, 61% are in education, employment or training, and this trend is improving quickly. This is an improvement of 16 percentage points from 31 March 2014. Current performance is 10 percentage points higher than the average for comparable authorities and 17 higher than the average for England as at 31 March 2014. The whereabouts and destinations of older care leavers are closely monitored and a range of tailored support and guidance is offered. A total of nine care leavers are currently being supported at university. The number of providers who offer apprenticeships and traineeships has steadily increased over time, from one in 2012 to nine in 2015. Four care leavers are currently completing traineeships or apprenticeships. In 2013, five care leavers started apprenticeships with the local authority; three are still employed and one left to go to alternative employment.
135. Thirty care leavers aged 19 to 21 years are not in education, employment or training. The local authority is continuing to track these young people and is actively providing support and guidance to help them to access work or training. Seven of these young people are not capable of work currently due to ill-health.
136. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors say that they feel listened to and well supported. Exit interviews are deployed when care leavers cease their involvement, with feedback used to develop service provision. 'Have Your Say' (Warrington's Children in Care Council) recommends issues for change and improvement in their annual report. This is considered and addressed by the Corporate Parenting Board and key decision makers, although specific examples of influence achieving tangible change are scant. There is an annual awards event to celebrate the achievements of looked after children and care leavers. Members of the 'Have Your Say' group meet quarterly with key decision makers, including the Director of Children's Services, the Virtual School Head Teacher and elected members.

137. Information provided to care leavers, including about entitlements, is comprehensive. Warrington was part of the all-party Parliamentary entitlements enquiry and all care leavers are provided with the Who Cares Trust guide to Leaving Care. The National Care Leavers' Charter has been adopted in Warrington and this sits alongside local pledges to Looked after Children and Care Leavers. Care Leavers participate in service redesign consultations, 'Take Over' Days, staff interviews and induction training for Social Workers. Income entitlements are a key component of pathway plans. Two care leavers who spoke to inspectors were not fully aware of all their entitlements, particularly financial entitlements for young parents to assist with childcare costs to support their college attendance.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
Leadership, management and governance	Requires improvement
<p>Summary</p> <p>Frontline practice, management oversight and outcomes for children receiving early help and social care services are not yet consistently good.</p> <p>Warrington was rated inadequate for safeguarding and adequate for looked after children in its Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in 2009. Since that time it has been on a largely successful improvement journey, but good practice is not yet consistently embedded across all services. Although leaders have good understanding of most areas of improvement, there are some significant exceptions. Warrington has been slow to tackle a recognised area for development relating to increasing the number of foster carers in order to reduce reliance on residential care.</p> <p>A lack of decisive action in a significant number of cases has led to emergency intervention by the police at a point of crisis. During the inspection six cases were brought to the attention of senior managers, who took further action to strengthen intervention. A small number of cases demonstrated that the good, multi-agency procedures developed to respond to child sexual exploitation are not yet consistently applied in practice. In addition, services for children on the edge of care are insufficiently developed.</p> <p>A new quality assurance framework is not yet achieving and maintaining consistently good standards across children’s services, particularly for children in need of help and protection and in early help services.</p> <p>Staff turnover during the past year at senior and middle manager levels and in social work posts has inhibited the pace of improvement. Senior leaders recognise that the new managers need help to develop the skills and experience to become highly effective in the challenging environment of social care.</p> <p>The DCS and the senior management team are highly committed and ambitious to improve outcomes for children in Warrington. They have acted decisively to improve outcomes for care leavers and health outcomes for children in care and take a systematic approach to tackling areas for improvement from previous inspections.</p> <p>Partnership working is strong and the combined Families and Wellbeing Directorate formed in 2014 has created new opportunities for collaborative work across services.</p>	

138. The quality of practice is inconsistent across key services, including early help and services for children in need. The quality of common assessments, combined assessments, plans and decision making is not sufficiently robust. Some children do not receive the help they need when they need it. Quality assurance systems are not yet achieving consistently good standards of practice.

139. The quality of supervision is not consistently good overall. The supervision provided to social workers is better than that for IROs and managers. A clear and comprehensive supervision policy for social work staff in Targeted Services was refreshed in November 2014. Supervision of social workers is generally regular and task focused, with detailed consideration of casework and evidence of reflective practice captured in the template for supervision. The template is not used consistently across the service for frontline managers and IROs. Consequently their supervision is less focused on their roles in improving the quality of social work practice and in holding staff to account.
140. Supervision of frontline managers does not provide sufficient challenge and support. Personal development plans (PDPs) were not in place in all files and there was little recorded challenge about learning and progression. Positive feedback was readily provided but constructive challenge was not evidenced. High levels of support and challenge are particularly important currently, with several new managers coming into post during the past year, as well as changes in two key head of service posts.
141. In supervision files sampled, opportunities are missed to reflect upon learning through training received, and areas for development highlighted in PDPs are not continued through the supervision process. This hinders continuous professional development.
142. Quality assurance was an area for improvement in the 2011 safeguarding and looked after children services inspection. Warrington has introduced a new quality assurance framework, with suitable arrangements for audit, reporting findings to senior managers and sharing themes with frontline staff. Audit reports demonstrate improvements in the quality of practice over time. The audits of tracked cases completed by Warrington staff for the inspection were of good quality: accurate, exacting and fair. The audit tool is fit for purpose and reflects well the experiences of children.
143. Following the 2011 inspection a process was devised for IROs and child protection conference chairs to make 'priority' and 'starred' recommendations in cases to prevent drift in care planning, and a process was firmly established for escalation to managers. The Quality Assurance and Safeguarding team provides regular reports to Heads of Service, outlining progress against these recommendations. There is also a dispute resolution process. Despite these initiatives, inspectors found that challenge by the experienced IROs and conference chairs does not always lead to timely improvements in service delivery to children and families.
144. Warrington's Workforce Analysis for January 2015 demonstrates that the level of experience across the social work service as a whole is good. Seventy-six per cent of managers have over two years managerial experience, 83% of social workers have over two years practitioner experience, and 50% of staff have been in post for more than two years.

145. However, staff turnover amongst senior managers, and significant turnover in two social work teams during the past year, has disrupted the quality and continuity of services to children and families. Within children's social care there are 68 social workers and 26 social work managers. All vacant posts are covered by agency workers. As at 31 January 2015, there were 15 agency social workers and two agency managers. In addition, one head of service was from an agency. Ten of the agency workers are concentrated in the two teams with high turnover, and represent around 40% of the staff in these teams.
146. The local authority completes an annual social work 'health check' based on the Social Work Task Force framework. Workforce issues are carefully considered, strengths and improvements are recorded, and suitable areas for development are drawn up in an action plan. For example, training has been provided to managers to help develop reflective supervision. The most recent health check, completed in July 2014, reports that all areas for improvement in the action plan from the previous check in 2013 have been actioned.
147. The local authority understands well the needs of the local community. There is close alignment between the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), the children and young people's plan (CYPP) and the joint commissioning strategy. These documents are refreshed annually. When needs are identified through the JSNA, commissioning is responsive. For example, additional capacity was commissioned for the children in care nurse because of increasing demand during the year. The JSNA provides detailed, relevant and up-to-date knowledge of the local community; the latest version was produced in January 2015. There are some gaps, with services for children on the edge of care insufficiently developed. Over the past year the number of children in care has increased by over 25% from 230 in March 2014 to 294 in January 2015, which is a substantial rise in this time frame. The council and partners understand the reasons but they have been unable to support enough children and families through alternatives to care.
148. Social work teams lack the capacity to undertake the life story work that was previously done by WWiSH. There is insufficient accommodation for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. Both of these areas for development are recognised in the JSNA.
149. There is a shortage of foster placements for older young people with complex needs. In January 2015, 18.4% of children in care were living in children's homes. This is 50% higher than the average in similar local authorities and above Warrington's 12% target. Senior managers acknowledge that they have insufficient foster carers and have revisited their recruitment strategy, as targeted recruitment has proved unsuccessful. The vast majority of children in care are placed in the borough or nearby. Sufficient adoption placements are available, provided through WWiSH.

150. A legacy of poor practice is still evident in some cases. For example, drift in dealing with neglect, and historic delays in timescales for children to be adopted still impact on the adoption scorecard. These problems are steadily being tackled.
151. Protecting the most vulnerable is the top priority for the local authority and is part of its Pledge. The corporate commitment to Children's Targeted Services is fully demonstrated through protection of the budget. Against a background of £16m cuts for the council next year, the Targeted Services budget has been protected.
152. The Lead Member refers to children in care as 'our children' and constantly reminds councillors and officers of their parental responsibility. This theme of 'our children' has been taken on board by officers and teachers who talked to inspectors. The Lead Member has significant relevant experience from her long career in health services, and she was previously chair of the corporate parenting panel. She demonstrates a good level of knowledge of issues in children's social care and is kept closely informed of local developments through very regular contact with the DCS. She has raised her profile as Lead Member in the media so that she can champion children as widely as possible. The scrutiny committee receives regular presentations from children's services and offers suitable challenge. It does not call for reports, so does not actively set the agenda. The committee received an update on CSE recently and has promoted training on CSE for elected members, a high proportion of whom have now received it.
153. Warrington moved to a combined families and wellbeing directorate during 2014. The written assurance statement for the combined Director of Children's and Adults services roles demonstrates that risks have been mitigated. The benefits include delivering better, more joined-up services for vulnerable groups, for example, through joint commissioning.
154. The DCS and senior leaders demonstrate good ambition and a clear vision to develop services and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. For example, along with partners they have established a multi-agency, integrated service for children with disabilities that provides single assessment and a 'one-stop shop' approach to service delivery. The local authority has been active in reviewing its Children's Targeted Services structure in order to maintain continuity of social worker with families. Plans for the restructure are at an advanced stage. Partners have agreed to establish a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) model in the autumn of 2015.

155. Warrington partners have been successful with the Complex Families Programme, Warrington's version of the Troubled Families Programme. Effective partnership arrangements across three local authorities have enabled pooling of resources in the WWiSH adoption service and an increase in available adopters for local children. There are effective relationships between Cafcass, the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB) and the local authority. Any issues of concern are resolved quickly. Good partnership working is also evident in multi-agency action to prevent looked after young people offending and re-offending. This has improved significantly over the past twelve months, and is helping to reduce the number receiving final warnings or convictions. Core groups, conferences and other children in need meetings are well attended by partners. However, there has been slippage in obtaining GP and CAMHS reports when these partners are invited to child protection conferences.
156. The Chief Executive ensures that children's issues are reported and discussed in high level strategic meetings in the local authority and across the partnership.
157. The Chief Executive is well informed, chairs the Health and Wellbeing Board and attends the LSCB. He has brought influence to bear on specific issues, such as the lack of participation by GPs in child protection conferences. There are close working relationships between the Chief Executive, the Lead Member and the DCS and between the DCS and the Chair of the LSCB.
158. Good systems are in place to provide managers at all levels with most of the information they require to drive performance, for example, reports to help managers track the progress of referrals and assessments and to check that statutory visits are completed. However, where there are gaps, for example in relation to care leavers who misuse substances and have mental health difficulties, managers are unable to measure effectiveness of services or analyse needs to inform joint commissioning proposals for improved service provision.
159. The DCS and senior managers demonstrate good understanding of performance and take effective action to tackle areas of poor performance. Examples of improvements are increased coverage of health and dental checks for children in care; raising the proportion of care leavers age 19 to 21 in education, training and employment; and continuing to improve placement stability through, for example, very effective support, training and development of foster carers in the fostering service. In some areas the performance systems are yet to have the desired impact. These include systems to monitor care leavers substance misuse and mental health.
160. The LGP ensures that focused decisions are made without delay and that all alternatives to care are fully explored before legal proceedings are issued. A further strength of LGP is that where Section 20 arrangements are in place, these are tracked via the panel and reviewed to ensure that legal permanence is considered and drift is avoided.

161. Effective engagement with looked after children was an area for improvement in the 2011 safeguarding and looked after children services inspection. As a result, a programme of regular consultation with children in care was developed and implemented. The Children in Care Councils now meet regularly with the DCS and the head of the virtual school to ensure that the voices of children in care are heard. They present their annual report to a meeting of the full Council and are represented on the active Corporate Parenting Forum and the Children in Care sub-group. Members of the Children in Care Councils take an active part in the annual Takeover Day, where they take over the jobs of Senior Officers and elected members. The 'Have Your Say' newsletter is distributed quarterly to every child in care and care leaver. This helps to keep them up to date with the latest events and information, and to share good news stories. The group is also involved in a number of projects, including helping to recruit senior managers.
162. The local authority is active in seeking feedback through a variety of channels. It has promoted the complaints process among young people with the introduction of the 'Shout Out' complaints leaflet, and the 'make your child's experience count' leaflet for parents, along with the commissioned service from NYAS. IROs encourage all their children to take a lead role in their case reviews, which has resulted in some children chairing their own meetings. Children's Centres organise an annual 'parent satisfaction' survey, to determine what service users think of Centre services. In 2014, 83% of all respondents indicated that they were 'very satisfied' with the services available. The Principal Social Worker (PSW) has a social work practitioner reference group and is involved in national and regional networks. The PSW provides regular feedback from the front line to senior officers, for example on the recent consultation on the redesign of the social work service and provides quarterly audit reports to managers identifying key themes and areas for improvement. The role is not yet having sufficient impact on improving consistency in the quality of social work practice. Social Workers told inspectors that they enjoy their jobs and are positive about the support provided by colleagues and managers. Managers are accessible, and caseloads are manageable. New social workers benefit from good support in their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE). The local authority has developed a post qualification 'critical reflection module', which all social workers will work through after ASYE. This is currently being evaluated for impact. The training programme is well regarded by staff and covers training needs arising, for example, from themes in case audits and serious case reviews.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board requires improvement.

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

Summary of findings

The LSCB requires improvement because:

- Although the Board has many positive aspects, its planning is not sufficiently outcome focused to identify the impact of frontline practice on children.
- The Board's business priorities are not effectively measured once they are implemented, which means that it is unsighted on the progress that is being made.
- The performance reporting system is not effectively used to ensure that the Board is fully aware of practice and management inconsistencies. As a result, there has been a lack of effective action in some areas to ensure that good practice is developed and promoted.
- Neither the intelligence provided by the Section 11 audit that monitors partners' safeguarding arrangements nor the detailed information provided by the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) leads to a sufficiently robust understanding of issues.
- The Board operates within a mature culture of respectful challenge under an effective independent Chair who is supported by a well-managed and efficient core team. The Board is well connected to other statutory bodies, in part due to a set of clear and effective protocols.
- Training is a particular strength of the Board. A well-organised training pool provides an extensive training programme, including popular, accessible lunchtime sessions. The programme is sufficiently flexible to accommodate emerging themes from national and local initiatives. Training sessions are evaluated and this is appropriately followed up to ensure that learning has been put into practice.
- The Board has a learning culture and has recently undertaken a peer review, following which it has swiftly put in place improved structural arrangements. This includes a suitably enhanced role for its Executive Committee to ensure that Board business is now streamlined and able to drive its core priorities. Highly active reference groups, including a young people's group, are adding significant value to the Board's functioning by providing expert feedback.

What does the LSCB need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

There are no areas for priority or immediate action

Areas for improvement

Business Planning and Performance Monitoring

163. Identify clear outcomes for all planned activities and prioritise them in the Board's business plan.
164. Ensure that the performance information provided to Board members, both in the interim and the long term, is sufficiently flexible to allow them to recognise and respond to significant shifts in local methods of intervention.
165. Align the Board's business planning priorities and performance information so that when it takes up an initiative, it has a clearer idea of what it wants to achieve by when, and can regularly measure progress in achieving it.

Audit

166. Strengthen the Board's audit process to ensure that it identifies practice that needs to be strengthened by the local authority and its partners.
167. Improve the standard of partners' submissions to the Section 11 audit, so that it is more accurate and evidence-based, and promotes a culture of continuous improvement.

Learning the Lessons from Child Death

168. Ensure that the current structural changes to the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) result in improved reporting to LSCBs at a local authority level.

Inspection judgement about the LSCB

169. The Warrington Safeguarding Children Board meets its statutory requirements, and is well resourced and supported by the commitment of the local authority and its partners. The Board operates to a detailed, overarching business plan and has adopted a range of Cheshire-wide policies and procedures, such as their compliance policy and procedures, sexual exploitation strategy, and CDOP. The LSCB has developed and ratified the threshold to services document 2014-16 and appropriate monitoring is leading to a sound understanding of agencies application of the threshold for early help services and statutory intervention.

170. A strong partnership ethos pervades the work of the Board and this, in large part, is what enables it to deliver across such an extensive agenda. An increase in the frequency of meetings of the main Board to bi-monthly has facilitated an increase in the volume of agenda items. Following an LSCB peer review conducted in November 2014, the Board's structure has been improved to enable it to deliver its business agenda. The Board's Executive Committee also meets bi-monthly to purposefully drive forward the business plan. The wealth of information generated by the Board's extensive business agenda means that it knows itself well and it operates to a mature culture of appropriate challenge.
171. The independent Chair of the Board is seen as credible and inclusive, while maintaining the right balance between challenge and support. She is held to account for the work that she is responsible for, and in turn she is clear in her role, which requires her to hold others to account. These processes are achieved through her attendance at a series of regular meetings with senior leaders, including the Chief Executive, who is also chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Director of Children's Services.
172. The Board appropriately uses its involvement with other corporate Boards to ensure that children's safeguarding issues remain a high priority. For example, the Chair's membership of the Health and Wellbeing board guarantees a minimum of two safeguarding agenda items each year, and signed, written protocols are firmly agreed. The Board has reported to the Vulnerable People committee of elected members and taken part in a summit held by the Pan-Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner to consider prevalence of child sexual exploitation within the county.
173. The Board is developing a 'dashboard' of multi-agency performance indicators. However, the current arrangements are insufficiently rigorous to allow members of the Board to understand fully trends in frontline practice from early help to statutory intervention. For example, the Board had not identified the significant rise in the use of police powers of protection or inconsistencies in the implementation of child sexual exploitation procedures. The Board receives and effectively works through the implications of a range of required reports, such as those relating to Private Fostering and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements and monitoring reports on early help.

174. The Board receives good information about safeguarding issues in the community from four well established and active reference groups comprising operational managers, practitioners, young people, and faith and community groups. These groups allow the Board to draw upon their members' detailed knowledge and to ensure that business priorities are tested out by those directly affected. Following the peer review's recommendation that lay members take a more active role suitable to their background and abilities, they are now highly engaged in the Board's current priority of reaching out to its communities, for example through the faith and community reference group. This group's work is having a particularly positive impact on the Board's relationship with its emerging communities, such as a clearer understanding of the needs of the rapidly expanding Polish community and the engagement of members of the Muslim faith, who have recently attended training events.
175. A comprehensive Annual Report uses information effectively to inform prioritisation. However, the Board is not yet successful in its ambition to be outcome focused in its planning, so that it is able to measure fully and report on the impact of its activity, for example, of its work to raise awareness across the partnership of the impact of neglect and of child sexual exploitation. Although the Board has evaluated increased competence derived from training and more children being kept safe, the business plan does not specifically identify the expected outcomes to be achieved and how they will be measured. This reduces the Board's ability to report on its effectiveness. The Board undertakes a range of Warrington specific multi-agency audits to inform itself of the quality of front line practice and this includes monitoring the effectiveness of early help. The Board is outward facing and open to external scrutiny, for example, peer review. The work within Warrington includes case reviews to capture learning from individual cases, inter-agency deep dive audits of the impact of multi-agency child protection intervention on individual cases, and themed multi-agency audits used in part as a success measure for Board activities. Detailed summary reports are produced that satisfactorily draw out the implications for practice. However, case tracking by inspectors found that lessons learnt from this process are not consistently influencing practice.
176. Responses by partner agencies to an audit undertaken under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 are variable in depth. The Board's own analysis of the quality of these audits evaluates that some are over optimistic and positive in content, providing insufficient evidence of achievement. For example, some respondents maintained that they listened to the voices of children without providing specific evidence of the way that children's views had influenced service delivery. The Board is committed to ensuring that the best response to this year's audit becomes the standard expectation for next year.

177. The Board has been active in a range of initiatives to promote awareness of child sexual exploitation, both through membership of the Pan-Cheshire strategic group and its own operational sub-committee, the Missing, Child Sexual Exploitation, Trafficked Operational Group (MCSETO). However, tracking of cases by inspectors indicates that it has not been sufficiently vigilant in checking that its own thorough understanding of the issue at a strategic level is mirrored by systemic improvements in practice among frontline professionals. The Board has conducted an audit of child sexual exploitation activity, and this contributed to the development of an offender profile which was used by the Cheshire police force to successfully implement disruption activity. MCSETO looks at patterns and themes emerging from practice, and uses this information to map 'hotspots'. A wide-ranging training programme is in place to promote awareness of the risks of child sexual exploitation, with the inclusion of new partners such as taxi licensing authorities and hoteliers.
178. Robust and responsive arrangements for training are a strength of Board activities. Its wide-ranging programme is tailored to the specific requirements of professionals and is based on an analysis of need. For example, targeted sessions are provided for lead professionals undertaking early help assessments and elected members benefit from regular updates about service and practice developments. The Board maintains additional capacity to provide focused workshops or lunchtime sessions when further need is identified. This ensures that it can respond flexibly to emerging issues such as radicalisation, and promote multi-agency awareness of the issues and the responses that are required. Training sessions are predominantly delivered by a well-organised training pool of staff. A satisfactory evaluation process is in place that suitably informs the planning of future sessions.
179. Learning is supported by a comprehensive learning and evaluation framework. There are no recently published serious case reviews (SCRs), though one is currently underway. A suitable system is in place to commission reviews when necessary. Learning from SCRs from across Cheshire and those published nationally is captured via regular reports from the Board manager to the sub-committee. Lessons are used to inform multi-agency practice locally, such as the planned introduction of Family CAFs following recommendations from an SCR undertaken in Yorkshire.
180. The pan-Cheshire Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) is currently in transition, with an interim chair and work plan in place while a permanent appointment is made. These structural changes will allow CDOP to take forward a well thought-through plan. This will provide quality data about child mortality that will potentially better inform the Board's business planning at a local level. However, the arrangements currently in place for constituent LSCBs to receive feedback and information from CDOP are ineffective. The Board is unable to discern with confidence local trends or take specific action to address identified themes, as it cannot be sure whether the information that is provided relates specifically to Warrington.

What the inspection judgements mean

The local authority

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

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

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

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

The LSCB

An **outstanding** LSCB is highly influential in improving the care and protection of children. Their evaluation of performance is exceptional and helps the local authority and its partners to understand the difference that services make and where they need to improve. The LSCB creates and fosters an effective learning culture.

An LSCB that is **good** coordinates the activity of statutory partners and monitors the effectiveness of local arrangements. Multi-agency training in the protection and care of children is effective and evaluated regularly for impact. The LSCB provides robust and rigorous evaluation and analysis of local performance that identifies areas for improvement and influences the planning and delivery of high-quality services.

An LSCB **requires improvement** if it does not yet demonstrate the characteristics of good.

An LSCB that is **inadequate** does not demonstrate that it has effective arrangements in place and the required skills to discharge its statutory functions. It does not understand the experiences of children and young people locally and fails to identify where improvements can be made.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

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

The inspection team consisted of seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and two additional inspectors.

The inspection team

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