

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

South Tyneside

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Age group: All

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with 66 children and young people receiving services and 32 parents or carers, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with '*Working Together To Safeguard Children*', 2010
 - a review of 72 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in September 2010
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust for Acute and Community Care Services and Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

4. South Tyneside has a resident population of approximately 32,300 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing 21.0% of the total population of the area. In January 2012, 6.0% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared with 22.5% in England overall. Some 4.7% of pupils speak English as an additional language, 2.4% of pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage.
5. There are 65 schools in the borough, comprising: four nursery schools; 46 primary schools; eight secondary schools; one academy and six special schools. Early years service provision is delivered in 40 settings; 27 are attached to primary schools, and nine to children's centres.
6. The Children & Families Board (formerly the Children and Young People's Alliance, which was established in 2003) brings together key partners from across South Tyneside. The South Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board became independently chaired in 2009. The Board brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the area that provide safeguarding services. Social care services for children have 120 in-house foster carers, and two children's homes.
7. Community-based children's services are provided by a referral and assessment team and three planning teams. These are supported by borough wide teams for: children with a disability, youth offending, adoption, fostering; and for young people leaving care. There is a children's standards unit and an emergency out of hours service providing cover for South Tyneside. Other support services include a range of universal, targeted and specialist services such as: children's centres; a family support service (FSS); and services for young people (SfYP). The common assessment advice team (CAAT) facilitates the early help approach in South Tyneside.
8. At the time of the inspection there were 316 looked after children. They comprise: 93 children less than five years of age; 203 children of school age (5–16); and 20 post-16 young people. The leaving care team is currently working with 104 people aged 18-21 with care leaver status. South Tyneside uses a virtual school approach (The Project for Looked after Children's Education (The PLACE) in its support of the learning of looked after children.
9. At the time of the inspection there were 160 children who were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase over the previous

two years. These comprise 71 females and 83 males (six were unborn children).

10. Children and young people's community health care services are provided by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust. Northumberland and Tyne & Wear Mental Health Trust have recently been commissioned to deliver Tier 3 and 4 child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). There are 29 GP practices and 22 dental surgeries in the borough.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (Adequate)

11. The overall effectiveness of the safeguarding services provided by the council and its partners is adequate. Whilst statutory requirements are met there are weaknesses in some areas, for example in the service provided by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to children and young people who are harmed by a person in a position of trust, which is not sufficiently well resourced to deliver the role effectively and thoroughly. Social care professionals had a limited understanding of private fostering arrangements for those children whose parents arrange for them to be cared for by someone who is not related to them. This means that potentially, privately fostered children are not appropriately identified and protected. This has already been identified by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the council has been appropriately challenged to improve its performance in this area.
12. Well coordinated early intervention services are quick to respond to the needs of vulnerable families following the creation of the Early Intervention Board, which has facilitated the clear 'mapping' of preventative services available across the borough. Following the establishment of the common assessment advice team (CAAT), there has been a significant increase in the use of the common assessment framework (CAF) to help families. This has reduced inappropriate referrals to children's social care and allowed them to effectively prioritise child protection enquiries, which are suitably detailed and lead to appropriate decisions for action to protect children and young people.
13. The quality of initial and core assessments completed by children's social workers is variable. Some are of good quality with an appropriate balance of risk and protective factors, whilst others have a poor balance. This results in some plans that are not robust, particularly some child protection plans where inspectors identified drift. The quality assurance processes in place to identify and challenge such weaknesses are not sufficiently rigorous and supervision processes are not suitably reflective. This area for development was identified at the unannounced inspection of contact, assessment and referral arrangements in 2010 and has not yet been fully addressed. However, notwithstanding these deficits, several examples were seen by inspectors of individual cases where good multi-agency partnership working was effectively protecting children, particularly for families suffering domestic violence (DV).
14. An effective recruitment and retention strategy by children's social care services has led to the engagement of a stable workforce. A good contribution by health agencies to keeping children and young people safe was in evidence, including impressive delivery of the healthy child

programme. However, not all services were appropriately represented at the multi-disciplinary liaison meeting. Strong partnership working with schools is delivering improved education outcomes and this is narrowing the achievement gap for vulnerable children, a key element of the borough's anti-poverty strategy.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

15. The capacity of safeguarding services to children and young people to improve is good. Well planned and executed reconfigurations of a range of services such as family support services (FSS) and services for young people (SfYP) have resulted in significant improvements to the delivery of preventative services to families. Key priorities, such as increased use of the CAF, have been successfully identified and delivered through the inclusive process to develop the overarching Children and Families Plan, although the plan and accompanying strategy documents are not sufficiently outcome based.
16. The council and its partners have an established track record of successful service development. Significant improvements were seen by inspectors to a variety of health and education services to vulnerable children and young people, such as positive changes to sexual health and substance misuse services and managed reductions in exclusion figures under the effective Behaviour and Attendance Partnership. Senior leaders of the council and their partners share a clear vision of a positive future for children and young people, and can demonstrate substantial improvements to the physical environment of the borough's housing and schools. A significant strength of the partnership is the alignment of resources through the Children and Families Board to produce a strong set of well integrated services. A substantial number of successful partnerships, such as arrangements for missing children and young people, were in evidence to inspectors under the effective leadership of the LSCB. However, its administrative arrangements are insufficiently independent. The Board also provides a well regarded training programme, although the impact of training on serious case reviews is not yet well embedded in social work practice.
17. Effective collaborative working was in evidence at all levels of the partnership, with a particular strength around listening to children, young people and their families and responding appropriately to their wishes and feelings. A clear commitment to, and ambition for, the borough's children and young people was demonstrated well by elected members. An effective youth parliament provides a young person's perspective on governance issues.

Areas for improvement

18. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in South Tyneside, the council and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- improve management decision making so that it operates to clear thresholds, follows an identified pathway and incorporates management sign off
- ensure that the identification, assessment and delivery of services to children living under private fostering arrangements are secure so that children are appropriately safeguarded.

Within three months:

- embed the LADO process so that the LSCB can be assured that all children eligible for the service are being referred
- ensure line management arrangements support the independence of IROs and the LSCB
- ensure that child protection plans are specific and contain measurable outcomes to which core group members are accountable, so that they can be reviewed effectively to avoid drift
- review the membership of the multi-disciplinary liaison meeting of health services to ensure that all relevant teams are represented.

Within six months:

- ensure that the lessons learnt from serious case reviews are reflected in social workers' practice
- develop an agreed, outcomes-based format for all strategy documents so that it is clear what will change as a result of their planned implementation and by when
- ensure that all social workers receive reflective practice supervision
- review the current proforma for case file audits and introduce a format that audits quality in addition to compliance with process.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 3 (adequate)

19. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people are safe and feel safe is adequate. Children surveyed and spoken to during this inspection indicate that they feel safe. All young people reported that they had a range of people they could talk to including teachers, social workers, carers or their parents. The junior LSCB has worked effectively in conjunction with other standing groups of young people, such as the Youth Parliament and the Young Carers group, to ensure that issues of child safety are regularly raised with senior managers and elected members. They report that once raised, matters are appropriately considered and action taken.
20. Children and young people feel safe in their schools. All primary and special schools and seven of the nine secondary schools were judged good or better for pupils' feelings of safety in the most recent published Ofsted school inspection reports. Successful partnership working is also helping to narrow the achievement gap between vulnerable groups in South Tyneside and the achievements of all pupils nationally. Good partnership working is ensuring that the diverse needs and educational starting points of the children of ethnic minority communities are being well met. For example, the proportion of Asian pupils attaining level four or above in English and mathematics in 2009 was below average at 64%. By 2011, 79% achieved this threshold; well above the national average of 75%. Effective partnerships working between schools, council services and children and young people themselves is providing a positive and highly regarded approach to raising awareness of bullying including homophobic bullying, and is tackling it well. A focus group of young people has developed an anti-bullying pledge that is backed by senior officers and lead members and has been signed by over 4,000 members of the community. Robust action is taken to tackle areas of emerging concern, such as cyber bullying, social networking sites and through mobile phones.
21. The emerging needs of a comparatively small group of minority ethnic communities have been well understood and responded to by the LSCB. For example, specific work, led by the Board has been undertaken with the three local mosques, including the delivery of training to Imams, teachers and community leaders, the development of a handbook and the processing of criminal record bureau disclosures. This has led to greater understanding of safeguarding within the local Muslim community.
22. Appropriate thresholds and arrangements for reporting child protection or safeguarding concerns to children's social care are well understood across

the partnership. All partners spoken to by inspectors consistently report that they get a very prompt response to any issues raised and an acknowledgement of their referral. Scrutiny by inspectors of the range of referrals indicates that all agencies are well engaged, particularly through the 'Think Family' approach, where children and adults social care staff effectively deliver joint assessment and delivery of services, to protect both vulnerable adults and children at risk who live together. However, cases considered for this inspection and discussions with social care staff indicate that there is a very poor understanding of private fostering arrangements. This means that potentially, privately fostered children are not appropriately identified and protected. The LSCB have recognised this and children's social care has been challenged to improve its performance.

23. The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is not yet fully developed. The safeguarding manager undertakes this role and does not have sufficient capacity to develop it effectively and thoroughly. Valuable advice and guidance is provided by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who chair timely allegation management meetings which are appropriately multi-agency. Effective links are in place with the LSCB, who receive regular monitoring reports and the arrangements for auditing this work are developing. However, insufficient action has been taken to ensure that all faith and community and non statutory agencies are aware of the role. This means that the LADO and the LSCB cannot be assured that all eligible cases are being appropriately referred.
24. Arrangements for the safe recruitment and selection of staff meet statutory requirements. Managers and head teachers spoken to during the inspection said that they value the helpful and robust support and advice they receive from the Human Resources (HR) department. In HR files seen by inspectors, appropriate recruitment and selection processes were in evidence with a very clear and comprehensive trail of appointment checks. Rigorous arrangements are in place to ensure that any disclosures or anomalies on Criminal Records Bureau returns are followed up tenaciously, with suitably high level of sign off by senior managers.
25. Appropriate handling of complaints by the council and its partners means that they are successfully used as an opportunity for learning and service improvement. Effective monitoring of complaints by the council indicates that 40 complaints have been received in the last financial year with a significant number concerning the referral and assessment team (25%). The majority are from parents and carers, with an increasing proportion from children and young people themselves and these are appropriately dealt with in partnership with the National Youth Advisory Service. Some evidence was available to inspectors that the council learns from individual complaints and makes appropriate improvements.

Quality of provision**Grade 3 (Adequate)**

26. The quality of safeguarding provision is adequate. An effective range of early intervention services and resources is well 'mapped' and co-ordinated across the borough following the creation of the Early Intervention Board. These services provide help and support to families to ensure that their children are safely and effectively parented. Parents and carers spoke enthusiastically to inspectors of the support they received from services such as children's centres or the FSS, which has been remodelled, and practice examples indicate that they are preventing family or placement breakdown in an increasing number of cases. Children's centres have been re-commissioned to focus on early help and prevention, they are working more efficiently and have increased their reach to more vulnerable families. Parents and carers of children with additional needs spoke very positively about the safe facilities and activities available for their children to enjoy within their local children's centre.
27. Health visitors and school nurses effectively deliver care packages to vulnerable families as part of CAF, child in need or child protection plans. CAF is well embedded in health visiting and school nursing services and there is an ongoing training programme to equip public health nurses with the necessary skills of a lead professional. The introduction of the CAAT has been of significant benefit, together with the introduction and measurement of priority outcomes to ensure that work with families remains measurable and goal orientated. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that children and young people have access to timely child protection medicals by appropriately trained staff. Where sexual abuse is suspected or alleged, then children are referred to the specialist, child friendly facility at Newcastle. Effective use of the CAAT and the CAF process has reduced the number of inappropriate referrals to children's social care, with a greater number of partner agencies taking the role of lead professional. Ongoing work with the police on the development of the domestic violence protocol means that in the main, only appropriate referrals requiring urgent action are sent through.
28. A safe, timely and responsive service is provided by the referral and assessment team of children's social care, with an appropriate focus on the immediate protection of children. Contacts are processed quickly and accurately and decisions are taken at an appropriately senior level, leading to the prompt allocation of work to qualified and experienced workers. Social workers have manageable case loads and those who are newly qualified have an appropriate workload; they initially undertake child protection work jointly with more experienced workers, who provide mentoring support and advice.
29. Detailed and thorough child protection enquiries lead to appropriate decisions for action to safeguard children. Child protection strategy meetings will almost always include police representation. A well

resourced out of hours' service links very well to the day time referral and assessment team. Out of hours workers have access to managerial support if required and their work is appropriately monitored by the lead manager for safeguarding on a regular basis.

30. The quality of assessments is variable, those reviewed by inspectors were mainly timely although when parents would not engage, some parenting assessments were delayed, leading to drift. Where appropriate, interpreters have been used effectively to ensure that families could communicate with social workers. However, in some cases, insufficient attention had been given to children and families' cultural needs or too much weight had been given to the family's explanation of injuries and incidents in a misplaced attempt to be culturally sensitive. Some initial assessments seen were very detailed and the core assessment subsequently commissioned was a repeat of the information contained in the initial assessment. This leads to children and families having to repeat their story for no evident purpose, and to unnecessary delays in the identification of appropriate services to help them. Variance in the identification by assessments of risk and protective factors, with inconsistent weighting being given to either factor, means that it is not always clear why a particular decision to help or protect a child has been made. Although this was often the right decision in the cases seen, and resulted in children being appropriately helped or protected, it was not clear how it had been reached.
31. A range of assessments offered to inspectors as examples of good practice were mostly good, with effective analysis, often with reference to theory and good attention to individual needs. Assessments for an external audience, such as parenting assessments for court, were completed and quality assured to a higher standard and better presented. These assessments appropriately included information from a range of professionals, in particular health and education. However, some assessments seen as a result of random selection were of poor quality and there were wide variations in approach. Most assessments seen indicate that children and young people have been appropriately consulted during the process and their views incorporated into the final document. Parents confirmed that they had seen assessments and although they reported that they found them to be lengthy, said that they were helpfully explained to them in a way that they could understand. Some children and young people attend child protection conferences and it is reported that many take an active role in this process. However it is less clear if their views influence the outcome of assessments, including contributions to those child protection plans that direct where they should live whilst they are the subject of plans.
32. Planning for children is insufficiently robust. Some plans seen were satisfactory, particularly where they were based on an effective assessment, but too many cases were identified by inspectors where there

had been drift in child protection planning. This occurred particularly in cases of long term neglect, where a range of contingency plans had been identified if the situation did not improve; for example, issuing a letter under the Public Law Outline (PLO), warning of possible proceedings, but these actions were not then followed through. Too many children are placed with family members under a child in need or child protection plan for extended periods of time, sometimes years, without any more than a cursory assessment of their protective abilities. Parents are advised in writing that if they do not cooperate with the plan their children will be removed. This means that the local authority has taken responsibility for where the child is living and in effect these children are in care without the application of care planning regulations and requirements.

33. Some child in need and child protection plans were vague, they did not contain measurable targets, outcomes or timescales. Senior managers acknowledge that plans need to be more robust, as it is difficult for professionals to measure progress, or for the family to understand what they have to do to bring about change, where to seek help or who can help them. Parents spoken to by inspectors confirm that they did not always understand what they had to do to meet the requirements of the plan. In some cases, it is not sufficiently clear what impact core groups have on bringing about change, as their meetings are seen as a monitoring process, although there is good representation from partners and some evidence was seen of good multi-agency working to support families. Initial child protection and review conferences are timely. However, some issues have not been effectively challenged by the IROs such as children placed with relatives over extended periods of time whilst on a child protection plan and this is partly due to current management arrangements, which are insufficiently independent.
34. A cumbersome electronic recording system does not aid understanding of the child's journey through the process of referral and assessment, and the identification and delivery of services to meet their needs. The council runs a parallel system of electronically stored documents and also has some documents filed in paper form; information is therefore gathered on three systems. Inconsistent recording of management decision making is time consuming and does not aid good practice, with some records made on supervision notes, some electronically recorded on children's files and some in notes of departmental meetings. This does not assist social workers, or managers carrying out audits of casework, to effectively track the decisions that influence a child's life.

The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe **Grade 2 (Good)**

35. The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe is good. Good partnership working contributes to the highly effective arrangements within the accident and emergency service (A&E) at South

Tyneside General Hospital to identify and safeguard children and young people. There is effective paediatric liaison and young people attending following self harm, substance misuse or in mental health crisis are supported well.

36. A well established multi-disciplinary liaison meeting takes place at the South Tyneside General Hospital and any concerns around safeguarding that have been raised by health practitioners are discussed and consensus achieved on how best to meet the needs of vulnerable families. Maternity services are not currently represented and this is a gap in membership.
37. Significant resources have been put in place to support early identification and prevention of risk taking behaviours in schools, with a workforce development plan to underpin the new models of service. Young people have recently contributed to a major consultation on the future of contraception and sexual health and substance misuse services and this led to a major reconfiguration of services across South Tyneside.
38. Good progress has been made in reducing the rates of under 18 teenage conceptions. However, the number of under 16 conceptions remains high. Enhanced sex and relationship education is being targeted successfully in local areas where there are high conception rates. Access to emergency contraception is good, with further training of pharmacists recently completed. The use of an electronic record within contraceptive and sexual health (CASH) services supports good information sharing and includes a comprehensive risk assessment on all young people that appropriately considers young people at risk of sexual exploitation.
39. A comprehensive package of support and intervention for young people who are misusing alcohol or other substances is offered by the Matrix service. This service is valued by those who use it and employs a good range of talking and holistic therapies to support young people. Planned exits from the service reflect good engagement. Effective use is made of a highly visual outcome tool that measures progress and is well evaluated and appreciated by the young people. Good practice was identified where a Matrix worker screens all attendances of young people at the local A&E who have been admitted under the influence of drugs or alcohol and each young person is contacted and offered a brief intervention.
40. Unborn children are effectively safeguarded by midwives. Efficient processes identify vulnerability in pregnancy and information sharing is appropriate. Improved arrangements are in place to ensure that there is a dedicated opportunity to see women alone to make a routine enquiry on domestic violence. Monthly meetings take place between health visitors and midwives to ensure that vulnerable families are discussed and plans are in place to support the mother and baby once delivered. A specialist substance misuse midwife works flexibly with women on her caseload to ensure that they access appropriate ante natal care. Additional support for

the emotional health and well-being of pregnant women is identified through risk assessment and arrangements made for care to be overseen by the consultant obstetrician depending on need. Referrals to local counselling services and the community mental health team are prioritised so that pregnant women are seen promptly.

41. Good support is provided for teenagers who are pregnant. A dedicated teenage pregnancy midwife holds teenage ante natal clinics and will also see young people at home if they find it difficult to access universal provision. Many vulnerable pregnant teenagers join the family nurse partnership which has recently increased its provision. Good support is provided with good outcomes in evidence for the young family, including the numbers who choose to breastfeed, who have their babies immunised and return to education.
42. Delivery of the healthy child programme across South Tyneside is impressive. There are ongoing opportunities to identify vulnerability in families and for early and targeted support to be provided to help prevent escalation of risk. Health visitors describe caseloads as manageable and they are able to make all recommended ante natal and post natal visits and contacts. Appropriate arrangements are in place to transfer children from the health visiting service to the school nursing service, with face to face meetings planned to discuss those children where additional need is identified.
43. Significant involvement of parents, children, young people and carers in the development of the new service specification for CAMHS was in evidence. A new model of care following extensive reconfiguration and recommissioning of local services is at the very early stages of implementation. The new service operates within the choice and partnership approach, supported by specialist therapy services with a single point of access. Commissioners have introduced a target to ensure that by 2013 no family will wait more than six weeks for an appointment and this should address the services current long waiting times. However, although there are some early signs of service improvement, it is too early to evidence any real impact.
44. Good access to therapy support services is provided to children and young people with disabilities and complex healthcare needs, although some parents are dissatisfied with access in schools to qualified speech and language therapists. Recent changes to service provision for children with learning disabilities and mental health services has meant improved access to care and facilities which is much appreciated by children and their families. Very good arrangements are in place to ensure that young people with disabilities make the transition into adult services well.
45. Clear and effective arrangements are in place to immediately escalate any concerns around children who may be at risk from an adult service user

and these were well understood by staff interviewed. Enhanced safeguards have been recently introduced across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear to ensure that the details of all children of adult service users are now routinely recorded and included in any risk assessment. Practitioners from adult mental health and adult substance misuse services report good partnership working with children's social workers. The 'Think Family' culture is well established across both the Trust and the wider partnership.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

46. Ambition for, and prioritisation of, safeguarding services to children and young people are good. Clear aspirations for the children and young people of South Tyneside are demonstrated by senior managers and leaders of the council. For example, the Chief Executive has high ambition for the borough's children and can demonstrate good leadership and prioritisation of children's issues through the South Tyneside Vision, a 20 year development plan which emphasises building resilience and lifting families out of poverty. The strategic partnership formed to replace the local strategic partnership and deliver the vision through the Shaping our Future Board is able to demonstrate significant improvements in the physical environment of the borough's homes and schools and an effective anti-poverty strategy, which has improved employability at a time when employment is falling in other parts of the country. Appropriate lines of accountability are in place between the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services (DCS), including the facility for briefing in the event of a critical incident.
47. Effective prioritisation of children's services is delivered by the DCS through a line management portfolio which includes adult and public health services, and active involvement in a range of partnerships, including the LSCB and the Children and Families Board. The DCS ensures that children's services are able to effectively deliver the borough's strategic safeguarding priorities; for example, through the retention of Children's Trust arrangements via the Children and Families Board, or commissioning additional strategic management capacity to enable delivery of the Munro review of child protection. A significant strength of the organisation, modelled through an established programme of visits to services by the DCS and the lead member, is the accessibility of senior leaders, who are widely seen as being readily available, attentive listeners and willing to act on feedback received.
48. A well considered review of the borough's strategic plans and priorities indicated that there were too many for implementation to be effectively monitored and delivered. The appropriate focus of the Children and Families Plan is now therefore on fewer key priorities and its accompanying action plan effectively outlines the tasks necessary to deliver them. The plan is succinct and details who will deliver what activity

by when, with a noticeable emphasis on the review of existing services and the introduction of new service delivery models within tight timescales under the governance of the Early Intervention Board. However, because the plan concentrates on process, it is insufficiently focused on outcomes and therefore less clear what each activity will result in that will contribute the delivery of each key priority. A coherent series of strategic documents relating to the key priorities are appended to the Children and Families Plan. The 'mapping' of the key themes by geographical area in these documents is a significant strength and leads to a detailed understanding of where the borough's resources might be most effectively deployed. However, strategy documents are generally not completed to an established format and are also not outcomes based, so it is not always clear what is expected to change, and they do not always read across to the Plan to which they are appended.

49. Clear commitment to and ambition for, children and young people is demonstrated by the council's senior elected members including the leader and the lead member for children's services. Appropriate arrangements are in place for them to be regularly briefed on children's services issues, with additional arrangements in place in the event of critical incidents. The lead member is highly experienced and is actively involved in a range of partnerships, including membership of the LSCB and chairing the Children and Families Board. Regular meetings take place between the lead member and the children's services senior management team, who report that they are fully accountable and frequently challenged by elected members on the performance of services. An annual briefing on the LSCB business plan is appropriately provided to elected members by the independent Chair, and the Board has produced for them a particularly helpful guide to safeguarding. The guide provides contextual information on elected members' safeguarding roles and responsibilities and includes realistic scenarios, in which it is clear how to make a referral and to whom.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (Adequate)

50. Leadership and management of safeguarding services to children are adequate. A successful recruitment and retention strategy for social workers has resulted in the establishment of a stable workforce that has a low rate of vacancies and does not rely on agency staff. Senior managers reported to inspectors that they have sufficient capacity and that staff were well trained. However, staff spoken to during the inspection stated that, although they had received training on the findings of serious case reviews (SCRs), this had not yet impacted on their practice, and this was confirmed by IROs.
51. Understanding by senior managers in children's social care of deficits in practice and resources is weak as they are not sufficiently involved in day to day decision making processes. This means that they are not always

familiar with complex cases and they are unable to ensure that decisions are in line with key priorities. For example, the council's own monitoring indicates that the use of supervision orders has almost doubled in the present year, but the story behind this is not well understood. No clear hierarchy of decision making is in operation, with no clear pathway in place to achieve management sign off and although decisions are usually sound, this lack of routine management oversight results in important decisions regarding children and young people's futures being taken inconsistently, at a variety of managerial levels in a range of forums.

52. Meaningful participation of children, young people, parents and carers in developing and improving services is a longstanding priority of the council and its partners and successfully embedded across the partnership. Groups include the Youth Parliament, Young Carers group, and a minority ethnic consultative group. Parents and carers from the Listen for a Change group speak positively about how their views inform improvements to services for their children who have special educational needs or a disability. For instance, consultation with them has improved the range of short-break provision, including play activities in holiday times.
53. An innovative junior LSCB meets regularly and undertakes activities to provide a users' perspective on keeping children and young people safe. The group operate to an established, focused action plan. They gather the views of other representative groups of young people including the Young Carers group and the Youth Parliament and have clear plans in place to extend their reach further. Young people in the group report that they have ready access to their adult counterparts on the LSCB and feel that their contributions are listened to and valued. Other examples of innovative work include the Youth Inspection team who are involved in quality assuring and in some cases, inspecting services.
54. The views of service users are an integral part of planning and quality assuring the commissioning and re-commissioning of services. For example young people's views influenced the recent re-commissioning of both CAMHS and youth homelessness services. Feedback from young people on the quality of the services they are receiving appropriately informs monitoring arrangements for services commissioned from the voluntary sector. Children and young people's views and perspectives have also informed recent workforce development initiatives.
55. Effective ringfencing of the children's services budget by the council against a backdrop of decreasing resources has led to services to vulnerable children and young people being successfully prioritised and protected. Economies have been successfully achieved through a combination of jointly realigning services with partner agencies, introducing more efficient commissioning arrangements and retaining key budgets. Service reviews have redesigned services to increase their efficiency without compromising on their quality. Partners such as police,

the third sector and school leaders all report unequivocally on the positive difference the co-location of services and multi-agency working has made to early intervention services to children and young people across the borough. They report that realigned services such as SfYP, which incorporates previous Connexions, youth and education welfare workers, are ensuring more effective and targeted support and good facilitation and prompt access to other early intervention services, which can support both children at risk and the broader safeguarding agenda.

56. Significant learning was brought to children's services from well established adult services' commissioning processes when the council integrated its commissioning function into a corporate unit following the creation of a joint children's and adults division. A good range of services is commissioned from the voluntary sector which demonstrates well the council's commitment to a mixed economy of care. The council and its partners have appropriately rationalised the resources available in the light of budget reductions and the sector feel that the changes were communicated well, and opened up new opportunities for strategic partnership. For example, one third sector organisation has taken on the running of a resource to young people threatened with closure, by drawing down funding unavailable to the statutory sector. Robust formal commissioning arrangements are in place with a range of third sector organisations and they have regular contract reviews of the outcomes they have been commissioned to meet through service level agreements. Contract monitoring arrangements vary appropriately according to the business risk identified, but all services spoken to said that the process was fair and that they were listened to and their views respected by commissioners who regarded them as full partners, although they would appreciate a greater degree of networking to build their capacity as a sector.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (Adequate)

57. Performance management and quality assurance arrangements for safeguarding children are adequate. A strong performance management cycle has been developed within a broad quality assurance framework, with clear accountability arrangements which includes learning from peer review and inspection. Regular reports of the outcomes of audits to the senior management team are included in the quarterly reporting cycle and these provide an overview of performance and actions for improvement. However, they are not always rigorous in their evaluation as there is too great a focus on process and insufficient consideration of quality, and this means that variability and inconsistency in the quality of social work practice is not addressed. Additionally, they do not consistently report on the impact of actions arising from recommendations from previous audits and where inconsistencies in teams are identified, actions are too broad to show how deficiencies will be tackled.

58. There is a clear role for the LSCB business manager within the cycle and a range of nationally recognised benchmarks for performance are effectively used to identify improvement priorities. For example, the council has been aware of the need to improve the use and effectiveness of CAFs across the partnership. Successful action has been taken, the CAAT developed, and training, support and guidance provided to partners. Information on CAF usage is meticulously gathered and tracked and most recent information shows a significant increase in the proportion of open CAFs, which means that greater numbers of teams around the family are delivering co-ordinated preventative services to families.
59. Clear evidence was available to inspectors that social workers receive regular supervision which is recorded in detail. Staff spoken to report that they feel well supported by visible managers who are available for formal and informal supervision. Cases are fully discussed; with some good practice seen, but the action required and reflective consideration of the quality of outcomes was not always suitably recorded.
60. IROs lack sufficient independence to provide appropriate challenge to practice deficiencies as the children's standards unit and the LSCB business unit are under the line management of the Head of Social Care. This anomaly was recognised and a new resolution process created, but examples were seen by inspectors of this process being ineffective. This deficit has been recognised by the DCS and firm plans are in place for the children's standards unit and the LSCB business unit to be directly managed by the Head of Strategic Development to ensure independent challenge of poor performance or practice.
61. A well established scrutiny committee operates to an agreed work programme and reports directly to cabinet on children's issues. Effective scrutiny has strengthened the council's response to a range of specific issues such as special educational needs and DV. An effective Youth Parliament meets regularly and operates according to an established workplan, including work on anti-bullying. The group meets regularly with elected members to provide them with a young person's perspective on governance issues.

Partnership working

Grade 2 (Good)

62. Partnership working arrangements are good. The LSCB fulfils its statutory duties well with good attendance at an appropriate level from all partners. The full LSCB meets regularly as an Executive, operates to an agreed business plan and is independently chaired. Good links are in evidence between the LSCB and the Children's Trust Board, as both chairs attend each other's meetings and members spoken to say that they experience an appropriate level of challenge from the chairs, who hold them closely to account.

63. Effective governance is provided by a range of LSCB sub-groups, whose chairs meet regularly as a management group to identify cross cutting themes, such as providing leadership and governance to the 'Think Family' approach. This was championed by the Safer Families sub-group (joint with the Adult Safeguarding Board) and had training, performance and policy implications that were successfully coordinated. However, LSCB members were unable to evidence demonstrable performance improvements from adopting this way of working, or provide evidence of its impact on their planned priorities. Thresholds for intervention are regularly considered and reviewed by the LSCB and the reduction in the number of contacts and increase in the number of safeguarding referrals to children's social care services indicates that there is an improved understanding of thresholds across the partnership.
64. Clear structural arrangements are in place for serious case reviews through a well attended SCR sub-group of the LSCB which has representation from key, statutory agencies and is independently chaired by a representative of a third sector organisation. Local arrangements to support the South of Tyne Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) and implement its findings are well established. Appropriate links are made between the CDOP and the SCR sub-group through membership on both bodies of the designated health professionals. In the event of a child or young person being considered eligible for an SCR, the sub-group meets as a scoping panel and considers the 'best way to achieve the best learning' This is not always a full SCR and can be a management review, although the rationale and distinction for choosing one or the other is not always sufficiently clear.
65. Effective partnership working to promote safeguarding led by the LSCB is well embedded and several examples were in evidence during the inspection, such as Concern Matters, in which staff of the housing department who frequently visit households in the borough, are given safeguarding training and carry a card which informs them of the action to take if they have concerns about a child's safety. A range of partner agencies spoke positively to inspectors during the inspection of the impact of the LSCB's comprehensive training programme. They had experienced a flexible response to their needs, for instance bespoke training that had been delivered on the premises to a sessional group of staff from a voluntary organisation, who could not attend daytime sessions.
66. Clear processes are in place to deliver the missing person's protocol through the LSCB's missing person's sub-group. Where a risk assessment identifies that a multi-agency, coordinated approach is required on an individual young person, the children's standards unit is appropriately notified, a planning meeting convened and an action plan developed. Return interviews can be offered by two independent organisations commissioned to provide this service, although the sub-group are aware that this arrangement could be formalised and improved. The group

closely monitors data to identify frequently missing young persons or specific individuals suspected of harbouring and/or exploiting missing young people and action is taken accordingly by police and social care.

67. Good arrangements are in place for multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) of families suffering serious domestic violence and MARAC representatives are of a sufficiently senior level to be able to make decisions at the meetings and carry those actions through. Comparative data indicates that the number of incidences of DV in the borough is higher than for statistical neighbours and tackling DV is therefore appropriately identified as a priority in a range of multi-agency strategic planning documents, including both the LSCB and Adult Safeguarding Board business plans. A well established Domestic Violence Forum is led by the Community Safety Partnership and includes well attended multi-agency training and a well coordinated range of services. Mature multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs) are led well by the police, with good attendance by partner agencies and sufficient resource for the meetings to be effectively managed. Good links are in evidence to both Youth Offending Services (YOS), who provide offender management to young sex offenders, and to children's social care, who are represented by a dedicated senior practitioner who takes the lead for both MAPPAs and MARAC. The MAPPA Board has created on-line training packages to raise awareness of e-safety and the LSCB provide multi-agency training to all staff to raise the profile of sexual exploitation.
68. Close working relationships has facilitated a strong and effective Behaviour and Attendance Partnership between the council and schools and this is making a very positive reduction in the proportion of children who are subject to fixed term and permanent exclusions across the local area and helping to effectively safeguard pupils. The gap between the borough's performance and the national average has narrowed well due to the high quality arrangements in place. The use of inclusion centres in many secondary schools alongside quality assured, alternative education opportunities, fair access protocols and managed moves is helping to re-engage reluctant learners and those at risk of permanent exclusion, increasing the proportion gaining appropriate qualifications and successfully keeping them safe in school. Partnership working extends to special schools, the Academy and voluntary sector organisations such as Skill Force. All speak highly of the positive impact of sharing good practice, ideas and challenges at their regular meetings. Individual school leaders speak of the difference such actions have made to attendance and exclusion rates in their own schools as well as to pupils progress. For example, one school's attendance rates have risen from well below average to average in two years.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

69. The overall effectiveness of services to looked after children and young people is good. The service meets statutory requirements and good outcomes were in evidence across the partnership with regard to looked after children and young people's health, educational achievement and enjoyment, and their ability to participate effectively in the services affecting their lives. However, strategies to address young people's risky behaviours are insufficiently rigorous.
70. Children in care council members report that their views are both listened and responded to by senior officers of the council and the lead member for children and young people, who meet regularly with them to seek their views on what is working well and what could be better. The group worked closely with the council to develop a new Pledge for looked after children and following extensive consultation, they have successfully relaunched it and are currently rolling it out across the area. Senior managers acknowledge that more could be done to promote the role of the children in care council and the revised Pledge, and to ensure that looked after children and young people are aware of their right to complain and the role of the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) which is commissioned to deal with looked after children and young people's complaints.
71. Assessments seen by inspectors were of variable quality, and some were good. However, there is no established process of re-assessing the needs and revising the care plan as further needs emerge as children and young people looked after in long term care get older. Several examples were seen by inspectors of effective plans for adoption, and planning for permanence is a significant strength of the organisation with exceptional performance on timeliness. Recording seen by inspectors of visits to looked after children and young people is of a high quality but its use to understand the child's journey through care is not helped by the cumbersome recording system where records are kept in three different formats.
72. An inclusive strategic planning process, under the governance of the Children and Families Board, has produced a Children and Families Plan which is appropriately focused on a reduced number of key priorities, including the safe reduction of the care population. However, it is unclear what changes need to be made within children's social care and who needs to make them to reduce the numbers in care. Senior managers acknowledge that further work needs to be done to deliver a reduction in the care population, including securing a better understanding of the issue by the council's scrutiny committee, so that it can effectively discharge its

responsibilities for governance where key priorities are not delivered and targets are missed.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

73. The capacity of services to looked after children and young people to improve is good. The council and its partners can demonstrate a substantial track record of service improvement. For example, the services offered by The PLACE to promote looked after children and young people's educational opportunities and improve their life chances, have demonstrably improved attainment. Good services are also on offer to care leavers, with significant improvements to the numbers in education, employment and training and placed in suitable accommodation. However, the variable quality of written pathway plans do not do justice to the outcomes achieved by the leaving care team, and service users do not leave care with a comprehensive summary of the health care they received when looked after. Health care services are good, but the role of the designated professionals is not sufficiently prioritised to enable them to champion the health needs of looked after children and young people.
74. A strong commitment to and vision for the future of looked after children and young people is demonstrated by the senior leadership of the council who have a particular passion for educational achievement. A particular strength of senior managers and elected member's leadership style is their high levels of accessibility, modelled through the regular programme of visits to services undertaken by the DCS and the lead member. Looked after children and young people spoken to during the inspection demonstrated high levels of familiarity with, and recognition of, the council's senior leadership team. An inclusive approach is in evidence throughout the service and most looked after children and young people are actively involved in decisions affecting their lives.

Areas for improvement

75. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and young people in South Tyneside, the council and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- identify and disseminate a clear process for the management of young people's risky behaviours, incorporating senior management accountability and sign off
- establish and implement a robust process for the assessment of family members caring for looked after children and young people as connected persons

Within three months:

- ensure there is a clear focus on the partnership's key priority of a safe and managed reduction of the care population and its effective governance by the council's scrutiny committee.
- review the arrangements for the designated health professionals for looked after children to ensure that the resourcing and accountability arrangements enable the post holders to effectively champion the needs of looked after children at both strategic and operational levels across the partnership
- promote awareness of the children in care council and the Pledge so that all looked after children and young people are familiar with them
- ensure looked after children and young people, their parents and carers are aware of the complaints process and the role of the National Youth Advisory Service
- improve the understanding of social workers of the full range of options available to allow looked after children and young people to live safely within their own family and community.

Within six months:

- improve the quality of written pathway plans
- ensure that young people leaving care are provided with a comprehensive summary of their health care
- improve the functioning of the recording system so that it is able to effectively describe the child's journey through care.

How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?

Being healthy

Grade 2 (Good)

76. Looked after children and young people have good health outcomes. The number of health assessments carried out and the numbers of children who have visited a dentist and who are up to date with their immunisation and vaccinations exceed all national performance indicators and most of their statistical neighbours. Good processes are in place to ensure that the health needs of children entering the care system are identified and appropriate health plans developed. The initial health assessments are carried out by an appropriately qualified paediatrician and a flexible, responsible approach to scheduling initial health assessments ensures that the majority of assessments are carried out within statutory timescales. The paediatrician who carries out the initial health assessments is also the medical advisor for fostering and adoption and this promotes continuity of approach and advice as she knows the children well.
77. Health reviews are routinely carried out for all looked after children and young people although the quality of health reviews and health care plans is variable. Until very recently there had been no routine quality assurance or audits of reviews to ensure continuous improvement. Targeted health promotion is delivered as part of the health review. Young people are offered a choice in where their health review takes place and this helps to engage them in the process. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that looked after children and young people who are placed out of the South Tyneside area have access to timely and appropriate health reviews. The designated nurse for looked after children scrutinises completed reviews to ensure that they are appropriate and complete. However, the current line management structure does not give sufficient influence to the designated looked after children nurse to enable her to champion the health needs of looked after children and young people. There is no doctor formally appointed to the role of designated doctor for looked after children though the named doctor for acute services is carrying out the operational parts of the role. This is not sustainable as a long term arrangement.
78. Services to support the emotional health and well-being of looked after children and young people have recently been recommissioned and are in the early stages of implementation. Specialist workers support the emotional health needs of looked after children and young people although it is too early to evidence any real impact. High numbers of completed strengths and difficulties questionnaires are returned and these are used well to identify and influence early referral to emotional health and well-being services. CAMHS are represented on the fostering and adoption panel as well as on the high need placement panel to ensure

that looked after children and young people who require additional support for their emotional health and well-being are receiving appropriate services.

79. Good access is provided for looked after young people to local CASH and substance misuse services. There are dedicated workers to support looked after young people who find it difficult to engage with universal services. High quality training is provided through the LSCB on promoting the health of looked after children. The designated nurse for looked after children provides additional training to foster carers on health assessments, their purpose and what looked after children and young people can expect during the process. The designated nurse currently offers young people who are leaving care the opportunity to meet with her for an exit health interview. Take up of the offer is low and the designated nurse acknowledges the need for all young people leaving care to be provided with a complete summary of their healthcare as current arrangements are poor.

Staying safe

Grade 3 (Adequate)

80. Arrangements to safeguard looked after children and young people are adequate. Looked after children and young people spoken to during the inspection say they feel safe where they live and within their community and that they could rely on their carers to protect them from harm. Parents and partner agencies share the view that there is a child centred approach to safeguarding. Local authority provision for looked after children and young people is judged good or better by Ofsted. The fostering service is judged good and the adoption service is judged outstanding. The two local authority children's homes are judged to be good with outstanding features. Appropriate action is being taken to address the inadequate progress made in meeting requirements at one of the children's homes full inspections. Effective safe caring policies are in place because the majority of children are placed with foster carers who are offered good levels of preparation, training and support. However, the management of individual risky behaviours is not set down in the form of written management procedures for carers. This does not promote consistency of approach or a shared understanding of how to manage risky behaviours most effectively.
81. Care Planning Regulations introduced in April 2011 are not consistently well understood by social workers and this is leading to inconsistencies in response to placing some looked after children and young people with family members as connected persons. In a small number of cases seen, looked after children and young people were placed under voluntary agreements rather than the viability of family members to provide safe care being rigorously assessed in a timely way. In a small number of the cases where looked after children and young people are placed with

parents, placements were not being effectively monitored and this increases the risk of them breaking down.

82. Effective monitoring arrangements are in place for out of area placements and commissioned services, with a strong focus on safeguarding, raising standards and promoting value for money. Looked after children and young people are not placed in services judged by Ofsted to be less than good. Clear contractual arrangements are in evidence and provider forums and quarterly meetings with providers ensure ongoing contractual compliance. Arrangements are in place to support providers should standards fall and there is a balanced approach to ensuring the child's holistic needs remain at the forefront of decision making regarding placements moves and decommissioning.
83. Consistently good performance on placement stability is better than comparators and being promoted through effective preparation, training and support for in house foster carers and adoptive parents. Also good attention to matching the needs of children; learning lessons via disruption meetings; short break support for children with disabilities; and effective monitoring arrangements with commissioned services. Educational stability is promoted by The PLACE and prioritised when children move placement. An effective, coordinated approach is in place for children who are missing from education and care. A strong Behaviour and Attendance Partnership is making a very positive reduction in the proportion of children who are subject to fixed term and permanent exclusions and this is particularly the case for looked after children and young people subject to fixed term exclusions, where the proportion in reduction is greater than that found nationally. No looked after children and young people are permanently excluded from their education setting. Well established protocols are in place between the police and children's services and work has been undertaken on a community policing level with children's homes to ensure a proportionate response to young people returning home late. Return interviews are conducted by an organisation independent of the home and the outcome appropriately fed back to assist in future risk management.
84. Looked after children and young people surveyed during the inspection report that they have an allocated social worker, the vast majority had a current education placement and most said they felt safe. Some less positive responses were received regarded their knowledge of their own care plan and how to contact IRO's between reviews. All looked after children and young people have access to an independent advocacy service, commissioned from the National Youth Advisory Service. The service operates to a stringent set of performance measures and these, alongside reviews of impact, are monitored quarterly. Data on complaints resolution shows that this year there have been positive outcomes in over 50% of cases.

Enjoying and achieving**Grade 2 (Good)**

85. The impact of services to ensure looked after children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. The roles of the virtual headteacher team and the virtual governing body are developing well. They have a thorough strategic oversight of the performance and achievements of looked after children and young people through very detailed assessments and information tracking on their progress, which is gathered and reported at least termly. Action is taken to ensure that any underachievement is swiftly identified, as performance information is appropriately used to challenge schools when necessary or provide additional support and interventions either in school or in the highly regarded education service for looked after children, The PLACE. A higher than average proportion of looked after children and young people attend schools that have met or exceeded the government's floor standard for attainment and progress and the majority are placed in schools that have been judged good or better by Ofsted during their school inspection. All looked after children are in full time education and the very few who are in alternative provision are provided with a full time equivalent through their settings, one to one support or other interventions within The PLACE.
86. Educational outcomes are at least in line with comparators and more often above, although the numbers of looked after pupils in each year group is small, which make year-on-year comparison difficult and some groups are so small that the national performance data set does not include them. Changes to the way schools and services are working to improve attendance and reduce exclusions of children and young people looked after both inside and out of the Borough are making a positive difference. Attendance rates have moved from well below the average for similar pupils in 2009 to broadly in line and current data provided by the council during the inspection indicates the trend is continuing. The proportion of children absent for long periods has fallen from significantly above that of similar pupils to the national average. A good track record on permanent exclusions from school is continuing and currently no looked after pupil is permanently excluded. The proportion subject to fixed term exclusion has reduced dramatically over the past year. Very few cases were recorded and current data provided by the council during the inspection indicates the reduction has been maintained.
87. Looked after children and young people attain well and generally make good progress from their often well below average starting points. The proportion making expected progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in 2011 was broadly similar to that found nationally and therefore satisfactory overall. End of Key Stage 2 school performance data shows the proportion of looked after children achieving level four and above in English has been consistently above the average for similar pupils nationally. Outcomes in mathematics have improved well and a similar proportion now achieves this threshold. Current tracking indicates the

trend will continue to improve and although the proportion of looked after students attaining five GCSEs grade A+ to C including English and mathematics is average overall, this represents good improvement since 2009 when no young people gained such qualifications. In terms of the proportion achieving five good GCSEs overall; this is well above that found for similar groups nationally. All looked after children in 2001 left school at 16 with a GCSE or equivalent.

88. Effective action is taken to maximise opportunities for looked after children and young people and care leavers to access leisure, cultural and enrichment activities. The improved PEP process ensures that schools capture the additional activities that looked after children and young people access, either within their care setting or schools. The most recent PEP audit indicates that 85% of looked after children and young people reported engaging in out of hours learning, compared with 77% in October 2011. The council continues to provide personal education allowances to widen opportunities for looked after children and young people and care leavers. This is above and beyond requirements and is good practice.
89. Good support is provided to individual pupils so no matter what their individual needs, they are well met. For example, action is taken to ensure that children with special educational needs or a disability who are looked after achieve as well as their peers. Support to children with disabilities on the edge of care is provided by the commissioned respite service at Foxden short break children's home and support for keeping up attendance at school for looked after children and young people with disabilities is promoted by the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership. PEPs are also being used effectively to access aids and adaptations, such as the provision of sensory equipment for looked after children and young people with disabilities to aid their learning. Transitions for young people with disabilities are well promoted through joint working with adults' teams and retention of case holding responsibilities until 18 by children's social care.

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement

Grade 2 (Good)

90. The impact of services to ensure looked after children and young people and care leavers make a positive contribution is good. They are consistently consulted and participate effectively in improving service provision. For example, good consultation with looked after children and young people has resulted in the improvement to sexual health programmes, which young people say are now well used and sensitive to their needs, and they were also closely involved both in the redesign of CAMHS and in developing the recently redesigned PEP. Looked after children and young people seen by inspectors during the inspection spoke

confidently about how they are being well supported to have a voice, share concerns and improve the quality of the service.

91. Children in Care Council members take their roles seriously and seek out the views of other young people, for example by visiting local children's homes and through their development of a DVD called 'Do you Know Who I Am' which is shared at conferences. They speak proudly that the LILAC quality assurance inspectors who visited the local area recently are using this video to showcase their experiences in other areas of the country. Links between the Children in Care Council, the Youth Parliament and the junior LSCB are good which adds coherence to participation activities and avoids duplication of effort. An effective commissioned, independent visitor service is working well with eligible looked after children and young people who are referred to the service. Their work is contributing to young people's confidence and self-esteem, providing an advocate to speak out on their behalf and enabling them to experience a range of interesting activities that they themselves choose. The process also enables them to develop skills in budget management, as they choose activities that meet their budget limitations.
92. A realistic appraisal is provided by the council's evaluation processes of the challenges facing the partnership to reduce offending rates of looked after young people. Offending rates are reducing but still above the average for similar young people nationally, at 10.7 %. However, this represents an improving trend and partnerships to reduce offending have been strengthened both strategically and operationally, with increased accountability to both the Community Safety Partnership and the Children and Families Board. Innovative approaches include the transitions pilot with probation for care leavers and good links with the police to decriminalise risk taking behaviour within the borough's children's homes.

Economic well-being

Grade 2 (Good)

93. The impact of actions to enable care leavers to achieve economic well-being is good. Effective action is taken to ensure young people leaving care successfully continue with their education and/or move into employment or training opportunities. Current tracking by the council indicates that 79% of care leavers are in education, employment or training and this performance is good, particularly in the context of rising youth unemployment both nationally and regionally. Successful partnership working with schools and colleges is increasing the proportion of post-16 looked after young people gaining Level 2 and 3 qualifications, at a faster rate than that found for all young people locally and nationally.
94. Good outcomes are the result of the successful focus of the leaving care service and its partners on improving the range of opportunities and provision, matched to the needs and interests of young people. Partnerships between the leaving care service, SfYP, the local business

community and the voluntary sector provide initiatives such as life coaches, and key contacts to help tackle barriers and improve young people's skills and confidence. This is helping to maintain successful apprenticeships and placements in college; 16 care leavers have accessed successful apprenticeship opportunities and there are currently three accessing local authority funded placements. The needs of individual young people are well known to the leaving care service, and they are working with partners to raise aspirations and increase the proportion accessing further and higher education effectively. For example, there is a gifted and talented scheme which includes mentor support from private businesses, college and university partnerships; a strengthened 'staying put' policy includes Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs); and free university accommodation available. The leaving care service also works with local universities to provide taster sessions to encourage greater participation in higher education; 17 young people are currently accessing further education opportunities and four young people are on track to achieve the results that will enable them to move to the university place of their choice. Specific support is available for care leavers with special educational needs or a disability.

95. Good support is provided to young people from the leaving care service. Care leavers who met with inspectors spoke with conviction about how much they value the stability of the workforce within the team and the care, support and advice provided. They particularly appreciate that they are treated as adults and not as children and the good support they receive to manage budgets. Corporate parents, the leaving care service and its partners listen carefully to the views of care leavers and adapt services to meet their needs wherever possible. The views of care leavers are canvassed regularly and they say their views contribute to positive changes in service delivery. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors say they know the senior officers and lead member for children services personally and that they visit regularly to hear their views. The views and cultural and religious needs of the very small number of unaccompanied asylum seekers are taken into account well when securing both pathways into education or training, and accommodation, and the two young people currently receiving support are in independent accommodation within a community that they feel meets their needs.
96. The inconsistent quality of written pathway plans and transition plans does not do justice to the good work of the leaving care team and its partners. They are reviewed regularly with a full contribution by young people, although it is accepted by managers that the quality is variable. A career plan has now been developed for all Year 11 looked after young people and these sit alongside the pathway plan and are helping in preparing the ground for their future choices and transition into the leaving care team.
97. A good range of suitable accommodation for care leavers is secured through effective partnership arrangements. A protocol with South

Tyneside Homes ensures a range of trainer flats is available and young people are prioritised for this accommodation. As a result, the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation is higher than the national average and their accommodation is monitored monthly to ensure they remain safe. The development of a 'host-family' scheme and the extension of 'staying put' arrangements are providing opportunities for care leavers to remain with their foster carers. Most of the care leavers accessing further education opportunities have benefited from this arrangement.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

98. The quality of provision for looked after children and young people is adequate. An effective family support service works both with families to prevent admission to care, and with foster carers and adopters to prevent placement disruption. Foxden, a newly commissioned respite service for children with disabilities, is supporting parents and carers effectively with short breaks. Newly commissioned arrangements are in place for Family Group Conferencing but these are yet to be fully embedded.
99. An appropriately resourced legal services team provides prompt support and advice to social workers, with adequate systems established to improve quality and efficiency in court processes. This is achieved via court user forums and in sharing learning with other authorities with some progress being made to improve efficiency. However, numbers of children on care orders remain high in relation to comparators notwithstanding a planned priority to reduce the care population, and decision making via departmental meetings to progress legal proceedings is not approved at a sufficiently senior level. No meetings take place between legal services and senior managers of children's social care to look at whole service issues and this does not promote a shared understanding of how to deliver the planned priority of reducing the care population. Consequently the PLO process is not being used consistently well or early enough to engage with parents where there are risks to children and reduce the risk of their entry to care.
100. Clear arrangements are in place to assess risk and make decisions about whether a child or young person needs to be looked after or remain in care. Decision making is at a sufficiently senior level if placements are required in an emergency, out of area, or planned via the weekly gatekeeping and/or high needs panels. There is emerging confidence in the use of revocation of legal orders and rehabilitation home, with some individualised planning in evidence, although the option of rehabilitation is inconsistently used.
101. The quality of assessments is too variable. Some good quality, timely assessments demonstrates good analysis and attention to research and informs the needs of looked after children and young people well. However, others are descriptive and do not reflect the changing needs of

children across time. There is no routine reassessment of children's needs and this is leading to drift in a small number of cases seen. Management decision making and oversight is inconsistently recorded and is not always focused on the actions needed to progress the care plan. Children and young people's views are consistently well reflected in assessments and file records and there is good attention to individual needs arising out of identity, culture, disability and gender.

102. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker, statutory visits are timely and appropriately focused, and children are seen alone. Consistently good quality case recording by social workers demonstrates well the work undertaken with children and young people at these visits. However, three systems of storage are currently in operation and social workers' confidence in using the electronic recording system is variable and this results in unclear recording of the child's journey through care. No management overview is taken of the timeliness of statutory visits and compliance is reliant on individual case supervision.
103. A strong commitment exists across the partnership to achieving permanency for children and young people. Staff and managers have good awareness of the permanency framework and care plans consistently consider alternative placement and return home where appropriate. Timeliness in adoption is consistently good and above that of comparators, and there is increasing use of residence orders and consistency in the use of special guardianship orders. However, life story work is not available as a separate resource for long term fostering and is only available to help children prepare for permanency in adoption cases. Social workers find it challenging to prioritise this due to other work commitments and there is a potential for delay where this is the case. The use of Regulation 24 of the care planning regulations as a means of assessing connected people and protecting children is not embedded as part of routine practice.
104. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for statutory reviews of looked after children and young people's cases and the vast majority of reviews take place within timescales. Looked after children and young people confirm that their reviews are child-centred, they understand what is being discussed at meetings and they participate well. Looked after children and young people are placed in external provision only after careful consideration and these arrangements are monitored safely and well by the review process. Improvements have been made to the completion of review reports, specific and measurable recommendations are now being made and this promotes more focused planning for children, although practice was not consistent in all cases seen. IROs are not yet meeting the care planning regulations by seeing all children prior to their reviews, although priority is given to children placed out of area. Effective case oversight is promoted by the allocation of a single IRO throughout the child's journey. There is a comprehensive and shared

understanding of the role and processes to challenge and improve quality are developing. However, the management of IROs is not suitably independent of the looked after children service and this potentially compromises objectivity.

105. Effective arrangements are in place to monitor cases between statutory review periods by care team meetings that are chaired by social workers and attended by the team around the child. Parents and carers spoken to value the meetings because this regular approach to care monitoring promotes an holistic approach, facilitates lines of communication and provides clear expectations in relation to meeting children's needs. However, this individual oversight of case management is not preventing drift in a small number of cases seen. Positive relationships between social workers, children, foster carers and parents are hindered by a lack of consistency in case allocation. Looked after children and young people, parents, carers and commissioned services all report frequent changes in allocated social worker and this is not conducive to focused or timely planning. Whilst social workers report manageable caseloads, the complexity of their workload presents a challenge, particularly where they hold high numbers of cases in legal proceedings alongside complex children in need and child protection cases.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

106. The ambition for, and prioritisation of, services to looked after children and young people are good. Strong commitment is demonstrated by the Chief Executive, DCS and other senior managers of the council to the aspirations and achievements of looked after children and young people. One notable and impressive feature is the high regard young people who spoke to inspectors have for senior officers and the lead member for children and young people, whom they say are very accessible. They undertake a programme of regular visits to services and groups and therefore enjoy very high levels of recognition and accessibility to service users, parents and carers, partner agencies and staff. Their openness and ease of access is a significant strength of their leadership style. Operational managers feel well supported by visible and approachable senior managers who are responsive to challenge and debate in order to raise the quality of services.
107. A robust corporate parenting structure is in place to promote cross party support by elected members towards improved outcomes for looked after children and young people. An outcome focused corporate parenting strategy evidences a clear understanding of priorities, such as early support to families to prevent children coming into care and a commitment to securing positive outcomes for successful transition to adulthood. This strong corporate parenting commitment has clear lines of accountability to the Children and Families Board. Corporate parents know the profile of looked after children and young people well, they are kept

well informed through effective sharing of management information and performance indicators, and they use the expertise of officers well to sharpen their focus and understanding. However, corporate parents acknowledge the need to further strengthen services to children on the edge of care and to develop a closer understanding with other authorities' leaving care teams where young people with offending behaviours are living out of area.

108. A positive approach to challenge is evidenced by the Corporate Parenting Strategy, which ensures continuous improvement, with a focus on building resilience and improving the life chances of looked after children and young people. A particular passion is the corporate commitment to improving the education outcomes for looked after children and young people. School leaders share the council's ambitions to promote their education and welfare and, through the School's Forum, have provided additional resources to increase the availability of educational support. They speak with conviction of how looked after pupils are prioritised in their schools, and cite improvements in looked after children and young people's attainment as evidence of the success of this approach. The virtual school's governing body have a very clear view of the progress and achievements of looked after children in their care, which has effectively informed their self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.
109. A collaborative approach is taken by the Children and Families Board to identifying and acting upon local priorities through the Children and Families Plan, and a significant strength is the alignment of the resources of partner agencies to address those priorities. A particularly effective partnership is in place between social care, housing and a local third sector organisation to ensure suitable accommodation for care leavers who request and require a council tenancy. The service had been highly successful and has contributed positively to performance on the numbers of care leavers in suitable accommodation by providing a stable, long term tenancy option for them.
110. Elected members awareness of issues affecting looked after children and young people is being successfully raised through six-monthly reports on the quality of provision in children's homes, together with plans to accompany quality assurance officers on visits to the homes under Regulation 33. Looked after children and young people are appropriately prioritised within the Children and Families Plan, which is complemented by a focused sufficiency strategy and sets ambitious targets with regard to reducing the looked after population. The council's scrutiny committee receives regular performance reports which demonstrate that this key priority is not being addressed and targets missed. However, an appreciation of why plans to address key priorities are not having more of an impact, or being effectively prioritised, is not sufficiently well understood by elected members on the scrutiny committee.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

111. Leadership and management of services to looked after children are good. A well informed sufficiency strategy effectively uses data to provide an analysis of need and inform the council's commissioning intentions for looked after children and young people. An appropriate focus is therefore in evidence in securing value for money when using IFAs, improving the quality of out of area placements, and the targeted recruitment of greater numbers of in house foster carers. This is being effectively implemented by an increase in the staffing contingency, to enable additional capacity to recruit foster carers through recruitment campaigns in relation to the minority ethnic population, career carers and adolescents.
112. Strong and effective arrangements are in place for commissioning services for looked after children and young people, including the council's membership of a regional consortium which has worked together with neighbouring councils and with IFAs to reduce costs but maintain quality when foster placements are required out of borough. A reduction in the use of IFA placements from 92 to 71 is in line with strategic plans and effective monitoring of the budget can evidence further economies in out of borough foster placements. The council has therefore agreed to extend this approach to out of borough residential placements, with a forward plan to include residential schools and day placements.
113. An effective recruitment and retention strategy has resulted in a stable workforce particularly in the fostering and adoption teams, which is appropriately resourced to meet demand. However, the higher turnover in the planning teams has led to the use of less experienced social workers and newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) to manage complex cases and a lack of clarity as to who is the decision maker in certain cases is leading to delays in care planning and completion of direct and life story work for children. Social workers spoken to were not all able to describe or differentiate between the different statutory and legislative options available to look after and protect children and young people.
114. Partnership working across the service is an established strength and managers indicate it has strengthened further due to the way that services have been reconfigured, such as the development of family support services for children and young people on the edge of care or in placements at risk of breakdown. Senior leaders in schools speak positively about the high quality training available through the LSCB to designated teachers of looked after children. They report that it is timely and robust and keeps them up to date not only on their statutory responsibilities but also on emerging developments.
115. Good partnership working to determine the best way to provide appropriate housing for young people vulnerable to homelessness has been successfully undertaken between housing associations, the housing

department, YOS, children's social care and homeless young people themselves. An appropriate housing protocol is now in place, together with a prescribed pathway which is easy for agencies and young people to understand and accessible to young people until the age of 25. Although the process has only recently been put in place, its impact has been immediate as young people can now access safe accommodation and none are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. To further improve the service, the partnership has firm plans in place to commission a mediation service that helps to prevent family break down post-16.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (Adequate)

116. Performance management and quality assurance for looked after children are adequate. A good and strong performance management cycle has been developed within a broad quality assurance framework, with clear accountability arrangements at a strategic level. Management information is used effectively to identify improvement priorities. For example, following the development of the FSS, which includes the previous parenting team, family support and family intervention services, intelligent use was made from available data. The provision of preventative services was properly prioritised and targeted to where the looked after children and young people population is highest. However, monitoring of this service demonstrates that a positive impact is not yet realised in relation to reducing the numbers of children and young people entering care.
117. A very detailed audit proforma is used to quality assure the case files of looked after children and young people. Files are regularly audited in a range of ways; including senior leadership sampling and 'deep dive' review. However, there is too much focus on process and insufficient focus on quality and this means that variability and inconsistency in the quality of practice is not appropriately addressed.
118. Regular supervision of social workers is suitably recorded but it is not having a sufficiently positive impact on improving the quality of services to looked after children and young people or providing clarity around decision making. Decisions are made at a range of meetings with a lack of clarity as to their purpose and function. Recording of decision making regarding care plans is not always clear, and the approval by senior managers of decisions made at team manager level is not in evidence. Decisions on major issues affecting a child's life are therefore taken at too low a level, and senior managers are not providing sufficient oversight of complex cases once children and young people are looked after. This leads, on occasion, to incoherent planning and increases the potential to place children at risk.
119. IROs responsible for independently reviewing cases are part of the line management system of services to looked after children and young people

and use of the resolution process was seen by inspectors to be ineffective. This has been recognised by the DCS and firm plans are in place for IROs to be moved to be directly managed by the Head of Strategic Development.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Good
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Adequate
Quality of provision	Adequate
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Good
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Adequate
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Partnership working	Good
Equality and diversity	Adequate
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Adequate
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Good
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Adequate
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Good