

# Bath and North East Somerset

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

and

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

Inspection date: 24 April 2017 to 18 May 2017

Report published: 7 July 2017

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

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

## Executive summary

Children's services in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) are good. The senior leadership team and elected members demonstrate commitment and determination to provide quality services to children in B&NES. They have worked resolutely to respond to the recommendations made by the last child protection inspection in 2013. Leaders have a well-established track record of improving services and tackling weaknesses.

Services for children looked after are good, and for children needing to be adopted they are outstanding. However, there is more to do to ensure that pathway plans are effective and that care leavers obtain the help that they need in response to escalating need. The support and services provided to children who are privately fostered are poor, with very few such arrangements notified and an inconsistent response when children come to the attention of the local authority. Children in need and child protection planning is not always sufficiently rigorous to ensure that outcomes improve for children. Consequently, services to children in need of help and protection and care leavers require improvement.

The local authority has prioritised services effectively to support children and families at an early stage. Families benefit from a wide range of well-coordinated services. Exceptional support is provided by the Connecting Families service, which has a positive impact through preventing children's needs from escalating. Agencies demonstrate a good understanding of thresholds and refer appropriately when children's needs meet the threshold for statutory intervention. Contacts receive a timely and proportionate response, and threshold decisions are appropriate. However, shortfalls in managerial capacity result in delays in the progression of work for a small minority of children.

Children benefit from sensitive and thoughtful direct work by skilled social workers, and most are visited in accordance with their needs. The majority of assessments are comprehensive and analytical and, when strategy meetings and child protection investigations take place, the quality of intervention ensures that children are protected. Children with disabilities benefit from high-quality support.

Overall, child protection planning is effective in reducing risks to children, but the response to long-standing concerns is not always sufficiently decisive. Managers and child protection chairs are not yet consistently effective in driving plans for children in pre-proceedings under the Public Law Outline and, as a result, a small number of children experience drift and delay. Once children enter the court process, their cases progress quickly, social workers produce high-quality assessments and reports, and managers provide effective oversight.

Children on the edge of care benefit from good-quality services that help them to remain with their families, where possible. When children cannot safely remain living at home, decisions for them to be looked after are appropriate. Timely and comprehensive assessments support early permanence planning for the vast majority

of children and they live with good-quality carers who meet their needs. Children looked after build trusting relationships with social workers, who visit them regularly. Most children who are looked after for 12 months or more are making good progress in education, but the level of fixed-term exclusions has risen. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are proactive in driving plans and providing challenge when needed.

Partnership working is good. Senior leaders and managers work effectively with partner agencies to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. The response to concerns about the risk of child sexual exploitation is robust. Led by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), partners have developed clear and rigorous operational systems and practices. The Willow project ensures a highly effective response to children at a lower level risk of sexual exploitation to ensure that they receive a proactive, early response to their needs. The operational response to children who go missing from home or care is also strong, but there is more work to do to ensure that return home interviews are timely.

The senior leadership team has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the service, and it is determined in seeking to improve the quality of social work practice. The caseloads of some social workers are high, but are subject to robust oversight by the divisional director. Leaders work purposefully to ensure sufficient capacity to deliver an effective social work service, but they also recognise that the service is under continuing pressure. Political leaders are committed to providing the resources needed. Vacancy rates and staff turnover have remained relatively low, due to an effective workforce strategy and a range of successful recruitment and retention programmes.

Leaders and managers are committed advocates for children, and promote a culture of direct work and engagement with children and families. Political leaders are aspirational corporate parents and work hard to ensure that children looked after have a voice. They actively seek the views of children through the junior and senior Children in Care Councils. These groups are making a real difference for children looked after in B&NES and actively influence service developments. They campaign effectively on relevant issues to ensure that children looked after are well supported.

Social workers spoken to by inspectors are positive about working in B&NES, and many demonstrate good knowledge and skills. Management oversight is evident on children's case files and supervision is taking place, but it is not consistently effective in driving children's plans.

Highly effective integrated commissioning arrangements ensure sufficient good-quality services to meet the needs of children and their families. Robust monitoring arrangements provide a sound understanding of service delivery, informed by the views of young people.

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## The local authority

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

#### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority does not operate any children's homes.
- The last inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children was in March 2013. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- The last inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in January 2012. The local authority was judged to be good
- The chief executive has been in post since September 2016.

#### Local leadership

- The director of children's services (DCS) has been in post since September 2016.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services and public health under the People and Communities directorate.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since October 2013.

#### Children living in this area

- Approximately 34,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Bath and North East Somerset. This is 19% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 12% of the local authority's children were living in poverty (low-income families) as at 31 August 2014.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 9% (the national average is 15%)
  - in secondary schools is 7% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7% of all children living in the area, compared to 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are 'Any other White background' and 'Mixed'.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 6% (the national average is 20%)
  - in secondary schools is 4% (the national average is 16%).

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

## **Child protection in this area**

- At 24 April 2017, 1,008 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,081 at 31 March 2016.
- At 24 April 2017, 160 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 147 at 31 March 2016.
- At 24 April 2017, one child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is consistent with the number at 31 March 2016.
- Since the last inspection, seven serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted, and three serious case reviews have been completed or are ongoing at the time of the inspection.

## **Children looked after in this area**

- At 24 April 2017, 167 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 49 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 145 (42 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
  - 95 (or 59.4%) live outside the local authority area
  - seven live in residential children's homes, all of whom live out of the authority area
  - eight live in residential special schools,<sup>3</sup> all of whom live out of the authority area
  - 128 live with foster families, of whom 54% live out of the authority area
  - three live with parents, none of whom live out of the authority area
  - eight children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
  - there have been 12 adoptions
  - six children became the subject of special guardianship orders
  - 63 children ceased to be looked after, of whom six subsequently returned to be looked after
  - eight children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living.

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

## Recommendations

1. Improve the quality of child in need, child protection and pathway plans so that they consistently set out specific measurable actions with timescales for delivery and clear contingencies.
2. Strengthen the quality of child in need work. Ensure that children are visited in accordance with their plans, and that reviews take place regularly to monitor progress and are overseen by managers.
3. Ensure rigorous oversight of children subject to pre-proceedings so that practice is robust and decisive in response to increasing concern, and that drift and delay are prevented.
4. Strengthen arrangements to identify and respond to children who are privately fostered. Ensure that decisions to support arrangements are informed by appropriate assessments that include required checks and are overseen by managers.
5. Take action to respond to the rising number of fixed-term exclusions for children looked after so that they are reduced effectively.
6. Ensure proportionate visiting and proactive support for care leavers in response to escalating need.
7. Ensure that services are appropriately resourced to deliver manageable caseloads and effective supervision that proactively drives planning for children and prevents drift and delay.
8. Improve the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are engaged in education, employment or training.

## Summary for children and young people

- Services for children in Bath and North East Somerset are good. Leaders, managers and staff are working hard to keep children safe and to make their lives better.
- Leaders and managers work together really well. They know what works and what could be better. They are good at coming up with ideas that give children what they need.
- Children are listened to, and what they say is taken very seriously and makes a difference. The advocates and the workers from the children's rights service help to make this happen.
- When children and families need help, they are supported quickly. Support workers think of very creative ways to help families to sort out their problems most of the time.
- Social workers are good at working out what needs to happen to make children safer. When they have done this, they make a plan that the whole family understands.
- For a very small number of children, managers do not make decisions about how they can be helped quickly enough.
- Social workers are excellent at finding families for children who need to be adopted. This happens quickly. Children go to live with families that meet their needs, and they are happy there.
- Children and young people who cannot live at home with their parents have social workers who know them really well. These children live with good carers who help them to succeed.
- Children looked after do better at school than those living in other parts of England. This year, more children than usual have been excluded from school, so we have asked the senior managers to do more to reduce this.
- If children go missing, there are plenty of people who look for them and do something about the reasons why. Other professionals such as the police do a good job of protecting children from harm. The Willow project is a local service that is excellent at helping children to learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Nearly all of the young people who leave care live in a safe place and are happy where they live. They have a worker who keeps in touch with them and who helps them with practical things. Most of them are still at school or college, or have a job.
- Young people who leave care need better plans to make sure that they do really well as adults. When they have to deal with very difficult situations, they need more help from workers to support them.



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| <p><b>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b></p>  | <p><b>Requires improvement</b></p> |
| <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Services for children in need of help and protection in Bath and North East Somerset (B&amp;NES) require improvement. Although services such as early help are resulting in positive outcomes for children, others are not yet sufficiently strong. This is most evident for children in need, where visiting, plans and reviews are not always good enough. Child protection planning is not yet effective. Managers and child protection chairs are not consistently rigorous, and the pre-proceedings process is not always decisive enough to deliver improved outcomes in children’s timescales.</p> <p>Children and families benefit from a wide range of highly effective and well-coordinated early help services. The exceptionally effective Connecting Families service evidences significant impact, ensuring targeted, well-coordinated support for children. When early help services are not sufficient to support children and their families, partner agencies have a good understanding of thresholds for statutory intervention and refer appropriately. Threshold decisions in the duty and assessment team are timely and appropriate. Decision making benefits from the additional information provided by the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), but further work is needed to ensure efficient workflow and reduce duplication between the duty team and the MASH.</p> <p>The majority of assessments are comprehensive, consider the child’s views, and experience and analyse risk well. When risks are identified during assessment, the response is robust and children are safeguarded effectively. Strategy meetings are timely, well supported by partner agencies and lead to effective child protection investigations. Child protection conferences are timely and well attended. Most child in need and child protection plans address the key issues identified at the assessment stage. However, plans do not always include timescales or contingencies, and some are not sufficiently specific or outcome focused. This makes it difficult for families, social workers and other professionals to measure progress, and can result in drift and delay.</p> <p>The response to children who go missing and those who are at risk of child sexual exploitation is well coordinated, with a highly effective range of services and support. When children go missing, agencies provide a robust response, but return interviews are not consistently timely.</p> <p>Services and support to children who are privately fostered are significantly underdeveloped. Senior managers have recently put in place arrangements to strengthen the response to children who are privately fostered, but it is too soon to demonstrate impact and, as a result, assessment, planning and support for these children are poor.</p> |                                    |

## Inspection findings

9. The early help offer in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) is a strength of the local authority. Children and families benefit from an extensive range of highly effective early help services which demonstrate impact in preventing children's needs from escalating. This includes a range of developments built upon existing services, including an early help app, an early help board, and an allocation panel to ensure a multi-agency consideration of need and the appropriate allocation of services. Early help services are well coordinated, supported by two early help workers based in the duty team. These workers ensure that plans for step down from social care to early help meet children's needs. A small team of assessment and information officers provides outreach support to agencies and oversees the common assessment framework to ensure that it is of a consistently good quality. The effectiveness of early help is reflected in the low number of children whose needs are subsequently escalated to children's social care.
10. Connecting Families provides an outstanding service, with excellent direct work with children. Regular groups and events are organised. An annual family feedback report demonstrates the impact of this service, ranging from practical support, such as gaining employment and maintaining housing tenancies, to confidence building and improved relationships. The service is helpful in ensuring that children's needs are met at an early stage to prevent escalation to statutory services.
11. The recently refreshed threshold of need document is understood and applied effectively by agencies. The response to initial contacts and referrals by managers in the duty and assessment team is timely and robust, and consent is routinely sought. Threshold decisions are appropriate in the vast majority of cases, but managers do not always provide a clear, written rationale for decisions made. Feedback is provided to referrers so that they understand the action that is taken in response to the concerns that they have raised. Feedback is not always provided to referrers from hospitals, as they are not always available to be contacted with ease.
12. The MASH has effective engagement of all key partners and provides timely, good-quality, multi-agency information to inform threshold decisions by the duty and assessment team. However, the workflow between the duty and MASH teams creates some duplication in processes and does not yet support an efficient response to all new referrals. Combined with the additional workload pressures currently experienced by the duty and assessment team, this results in some minor delays in referral progression. However, serious or urgent concerns are prioritised and dealt with promptly. Senior managers are aware of these issues and have been proactive in ensuring the continuing review of the MASH, alongside reviewing the capacity of the duty service.

13. Most assessments are comprehensive and use chronologies effectively to inform the analysis of risk or protective factors. Children's views and their cultural identity are well considered, and there is a sound understanding of the impact of domestic abuse, parental mental health and parental substance misuse. Social workers make good use of research to inform analysis in some assessments seen by inspectors. Assessments are updated as part of the review of the child protection conference process, but not always in response to significant events in children's lives.
14. Social workers and managers take decisive action when children are at risk of harm. Timely, well-attended strategy meetings result in good information sharing. Partners work effectively to carry out child protection investigations which result in sound risk assessments. When concerns regarding children's welfare escalate, there is timely progression to child protection conferences. Most conferences are well attended by partners, who share key information effectively.
15. The voice of the child and their lived experience is evident in child protection reports, and there is consistently good attention to issues relating to children's ethnicity, disability and cultural needs. Children subject to child protection plans and children with disabilities benefit from high-quality independent advocacy services which are used extensively to ensure that children's views inform planning. The disabled children's team provides a good-quality service to children with disabilities. Social workers engage well with children, families and agencies to ensure that children receive the help and protection needed to safeguard their welfare.
16. High-quality direct work demonstrates that social workers make significant efforts to build trusting relationships with children and to understand their world. Children's views are systematically sought and listened to, and social workers demonstrate a good understanding of the children whom they work with.
17. Most children are visited in accordance with their needs, though visits are not consistently timely for all children in need. Inspectors saw examples of gaps in visits to a small number of children subject to child in need plans. When children in need are visited, work is not consistently proactive in responding to their individual needs. Not all child in need plans are reviewed at intervals proportionate to the child's circumstances. As a result, escalating risks are not always recognised in a timely way. Where these shortfalls were identified in cases seen by inspectors, managers had not been effective in identifying such gaps or in ensuring decisive action.
18. Plans are of variable quality. Strong plans are specific, have clear measurable outcomes and fully consider how children's needs will be met. Weak plans, more evident in child in need work, often lack timescales for delivery or contingencies. Core groups and child in need reviews are mostly timely, but some gaps are evident in child in need reviews. A small minority of reviews

lack focus and are not rigorous in driving actions or measuring progress against the plan in a timely way. Consequently, for some children, this results in drift and delay. In these circumstances, managers and child protection chairs have not been consistently effective in challenging drift or ensuring decisive action to improve children's circumstances. (Recommendation)

19. When concerns about children escalate, action is taken through proportionate use of the Public Law Outline. Legal planning meetings and a legal panel oversee decision making regarding next steps. Letters before proceedings clearly set out what is required of parents to make positive changes. However, not all children's plans are monitored or reviewed effectively to ensure delivery of key actions, and there is no robust central process for tracking and overseeing pre-proceedings work. As a result, delays in key processes are not proactively identified before drift occurs. Consequently, a very small minority of children are left in unsuitable situations for too long. (Recommendation)
20. Case recording and chronologies in child protection cases are mostly up to date, but recording is less consistent in child in need work. When there have been deficits in practice, management oversight has not progressed the plans or addressed the deficits. Child protection chairs, although offering some challenge, are not consistently effective in rectifying shortfalls in practice with sufficient pace. Senior managers had identified these weakness prior to the inspection and taken action to strengthen the child protection service, but it is too early to evidence any impact.
21. Children benefit from good access to a wide range of high-quality services to support them when there are concerns about domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or parental mental health issues. Children living in households where there is a high risk of domestic abuse benefit from multi-agency risk assessment conferences. Clear thresholds and good partnership engagement, with each agency demonstrating ownership of their roles, result in reduced risk for children in contact with individuals who are considered to be of the highest risk. Poor-quality domestic abuse notifications from the police undermine the quality of subsequent social work decision making and assessments. The local authority has taken action to respond to these weaknesses and the police are currently working to strengthen the quality of notifications.
22. Work to protect children at risk of sexual exploitation is effective for most children. Risk assessments inform ongoing planning, and agencies work well together to share information and ensure that children are protected. A range of well-coordinated services support children at risk of sexual exploitation. The Willow project evidences the commitment across the partnership to support children before their needs escalate. This project is an exceptional service which demonstrates improved outcomes for children and ensures that at the earliest opportunity children obtain the help that they need to understand how to keep safe.

23. For children who go missing, there is a well-managed and effective response, with persistent efforts to engage children. Return home interviews take place in response to 'missing' episodes, identify risk, and provide clear information for planning for and supporting the child. However, there is still work to do to improve the timeliness with which return home interviews take place. The local authority is aware of this shortfall and work is already underway to strengthen it.
24. The local authority makes good efforts to stay in touch with electively home-educated children and their parents. Children known to be missing education are closely tracked and monitored. A local authority-wide multi-agency panel maintains an active overview of all children missing education and plays a strong advocacy role to ensure that each child eventually gains access to appropriate education settings. This panel ensures that schools are held to account and that they meet their statutory responsibilities for admitting children, including children who are, or who have previously been, excluded from education.
25. A specialist service provides an effective response to the needs of homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. Effective joint arrangements with housing and a commissioned advocacy service ensure that young people receive objective, independent advice about their rights and entitlements to become looked after. Young people are offered an appropriate and currently expanding range of provision. The local authority has not been entirely successful in eliminating the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This provision has been used in two instances in the past six months when all other options had been exhausted or declined. It has been time limited, risk assessed and appropriately escalated to the divisional director. Workers demonstrate an impressive understanding of risks, including of child sexual exploitation and going missing, and young people access a wide range of support and intervention services.
26. The response to privately fostered children is poor. Awareness raising has been limited and there are very few children in private fostering arrangements. Not all children receive rigorous private fostering assessments. There is insufficient monitoring of key performance in respect of private fostering arrangements, such as the timeliness of visits and reviews. Arrangements to respond to private fostering have recently been strengthened, but more work is required to ensure that children's circumstances are robustly assessed, and that children and carers are supported effectively. (Recommendation)
27. Responses to allegations against professionals are well managed by the designated officer. Information sharing is effective and allegations are taken seriously, resulting in robust assessments and plans.

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| <p><b>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</b></p>  | <p><b>Good</b></p> |
| <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Children enjoy positive and purposeful relationships with their social workers and the people who care for and support them. Foster carers provide children with good, stable homes and are committed to meeting their needs. Children benefit from direct work and therapeutic support, and their wishes and feelings influence plans.</p> <p>Children on the edge of care receive a wide range of services that support them to remain safely in the care of their families, where possible. Decisions for children to become looked after are evidence based, appropriate and, for the vast majority, timely. As a result, the risk to these children is reduced effectively.</p> <p>Risk to children looked after who go missing and are at risk of sexual exploitation is recognised well, and children benefit from a wide range of support services. Decisive and effective action is taken to safeguard children and to reduce risk. Clear planning ensures that children’s long-term needs are carefully considered.</p> <p>Children’s participation in their looked after reviews is particularly strong. Almost all children are enabled to participate in their reviews and they receive excellent advocacy support. Children’s wishes and feelings are considered carefully and contribute to decision making. Independent reviewing officers are effective in their role. Proactive and purposeful partnership work by the virtual school ensures that children looked after progress and achieve well educationally, with effective support in place for every child. However, too many children have recently experienced fixed-term exclusions.</p> <p>Adoption services are outstanding. Children with a plan for adoption are identified at an early stage and are prepared well to live with their adoptive families. Highly skilled social workers carefully prepare and support adopters through high-quality assessments, preparation training and post-adoption support. Consequently, children progress well in their adoptive homes.</p> <p>Services for care leavers require improvement. The quality of pathway plans is inconsistent. Visits to young people are not always proportionate to need, and not all family support practitioners are proactive enough in responding to the needs of very vulnerable young people, particularly where there are escalating risks.</p> <p>The junior and senior Children in Care Councils are well established and influential, and their contribution is very highly valued. They provide strong representation on behalf of children looked after in Bath and North East Somerset.</p> |                    |

## Inspection findings

28. Appropriate decisions are made for children to become looked after in Bath and North East Somerset (BN&ES), based on comprehensive assessments of risk and need. Thresholds for care are consistently applied, resulting in the right children becoming looked after.
29. Children who are on the edge of care receive a wide range of services that are helpful in supporting them to remain at home, when it is safe to do so. Child and family intervention practitioners work alongside parents and children to provide intensive support to enable children to remain safely within their families. Children normally enter the care of the local authority in a planned manner.
30. Legal permanence for children is secured in good time. Care proceedings are timely, with the average length of proceedings decreasing from 30 weeks to 28 weeks since 2015–16. Working relationships between the local authority, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the judiciary are positive. Social workers produce high-quality assessments and reports for the court, and these ensure that legal permanence for children is secured without delay.
31. The local authority supports children being cared for by their birth families, where this is possible, and safeguards their welfare. Most family and friends and special guardianship assessments are thorough and evaluative, with balanced and carefully weighed analyses of strengths and vulnerabilities. They include a clear evaluation of applicants' capacities to safeguard children and to provide nurturing parenting throughout their childhoods. For children who have returned home to their parents' care, assessments are not always sufficiently robust, and sometimes social workers and managers are over-optimistic about the ability of parents to meet children's needs.
32. Children live with carers who meet their needs and provide stability. There is sufficient placement choice, with high-quality independent fostering agency placements sourced and managed by the commissioning team through a well-established regional commissioning framework. The local authority achieved its target to recruit eight new carers last year, increasing the in-house fostering resources.
33. A careful and thorough approach is taken to ensure that children are suitably matched foster families. This thoughtful approach is reflected in the sustained record of strong, long-term placement stability over the past three years, which means that children do not experience unplanned or unnecessary placement moves. Short-term placement stability has declined slightly, but this is affected by a small number of children with very complex needs who have experienced moves. Recording on children's files does not consistently evidence the thought given to matching, yet this would help these children in

the future to understand the reasons for decisions. Managers already have action in hand to respond to this shortfall.

34. The panel rigorously scrutinises the approval of new foster carers through detailed evaluation of timely, well-written and reflective social work assessments. The quality of foster carer annual reviews is uniformly high, with foster carers able to undertake good-quality training. Foster carers welcome the specialist advice that they receive for children with particularly complex needs, provided by a dedicated clinical psychologist. Children's leisure interests are strongly promoted through innovative schemes which offer regular activity-based programmes for children in school holidays. Contact with brothers, sisters and other family members is actively promoted and supported. A children in foster care group meets quarterly and includes activity outings.
35. Most children looked after who are living outside the local authority area live in neighbouring local authorities and are relatively close to their homes. Children who are placed a distance away are so placed for the right reasons and in the long-term best interests of these children. Social workers visit these children regularly, and communication with care providers is good. Contact with family and friends is well supported. Inspectors saw good practice, with well-planned transitions for children moving into residential care.
36. Responses to children who go missing from care or who are at risk of child sexual exploitation are robust. When children looked after go missing from their placement, the police are alerted in a timely way, and appropriate information sharing takes place. Return home interviews are undertaken which are, overall, timely, and appropriately identify risk and protective factors. Children at risk of child sexual exploitation benefit from multi-agency plans to reduce the risk, and these are regularly reviewed. Children who go missing from care or who are at risk of sexual exploitation have access to a range of very effective support services commissioned by the local authority, such as the Willow project.
37. Social workers have developed very positive, trusting relationships with children, and are attuned to the children whom they work with. When speaking with social workers, the individual needs and personalities of children shone through. This sensitive direct work and engagement with children is key to helping children and young people to understand their early childhood experiences. Children and young people are seen, and seen alone, by their social workers. Visits are proportionate to children's needs, and analytical and reflective recording of the voice of the child is evident on the majority of files. Manageable caseloads support social workers to maintain regular direct contact with children so that positive and purposeful relationships can be nurtured. A very high number of children benefit from an advocate through an externally commissioned service. This effective service supports young people to express their views well.



38. The needs of children who remain looked after are reassessed by a rolling programme of single assessments updated every two years, or as determined by a change in circumstances. The quality and timeliness of single assessments are generally good, and assessments are clear and comprehensive, overall. Most children have an up-to-date assessment in place.
39. The virtual school works closely and very effectively with schools in and out of the area to ensure that children looked after have a good-quality education, are kept safe from bullying, and that interventions and support strategies are in place so that each child can achieve well. Just over 90% of children are placed in schools which are judged good or better. The virtual school has achieved steadily improved outcomes for children looked after in successive years.
40. No children looked after have been permanently excluded from school in the past two years, but the level of fixed-term exclusions has risen and is now high, at 14%. No action plan is currently in place to reduce fixed-term exclusions. (Recommendation)
41. Schools complete detailed personal education plans (PEPs) for children twice a year. The large majority of these plans are highly individualised, very well-informed by the teachers' and the child's views, and focused on specific needs. However, a minority of PEPs do not include precise targets. Schools use the pupil premium effectively to provide practical support and development opportunities for children. Measurable improvements in educational and personal outcomes for children are evident.
42. The attainment and progress of most children who have been looked after for more than 12 months are good, and are broadly the same for children who attend schools either in or out of the area. In 2015–16, children's attainment at GCSE level was high. The proportion achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics was slightly over double that of children looked after nationally, and well over twice the national rate for English and mathematics at grade C or above. This high level of attainment provides B&NES children with improved opportunities for entry to further education of their choice. Nevertheless, a declining proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds in the academic year so far is engaged in education, employment or training. (Recommendation)
43. The local authority identifies and supports well the health needs of young people through a variety of co-located commissioned services. These include bespoke independent psychology support for carers and staff, as well as direct work for the most complex young people. These services promote attachment and placement stability for children looked after. The children looked after nurses and the designated doctor ensure that children's physical health needs are given careful early consideration when they enter care and are routinely addressed in case planning.

44. The local authority has improved the timeliness of initial health assessments and review health assessments for children looked after. Most initial and review health assessments are carried out in a timely way, but some minor delays are experienced when children have more complex needs and are placed out of area. This does not preclude children from accessing primary healthcare.
45. When children need additional help with their emotional health, they receive a timely and focused service. The local authority employs a clinical psychologist, seconded to and co-located with the placements team. The psychologist provides effective therapeutic support to foster carers, special guardians and adopters (including pre-and post-adoption support) to promote placement stability and prevent placement breakdown.
46. Most children have their diversity and identity needs met well. Sensitive responses to children's individual needs, for example relating to religion and ethnicity, are evident in care planning and the accounts of social workers. The importance of contact with family members in supporting children's identity is well understood. Work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is particularly sensitive, with access to a number of additional resources to enable appropriate support to meet their cultural needs.
47. Good-quality, detailed care plans address the needs of children well. Children looked after reviews are timely and effective. Almost all children participate in their reviews in some way, and their wishes and feelings are carefully considered in care planning. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) visit children between reviews, where possible. They apply rigour in their role and are effective in ensuring that care plans progress in a timely way and meet children's needs. The IRO service escalates issues appropriately on behalf of children looked after, and these are dealt with through a robust issues resolution process.
48. The junior and senior Children in Care Councils are very focused and active groups. They provide strong representation on behalf of children looked after, and are active members of the corporate parenting group and the Children in Care Council steering group. They campaign effectively on a number of relevant issues and have recently promoted their group by means of a radio podcast. This includes work to develop child-friendly care plans, the development of health passports for younger children in care and engagement in a fitness target consultation event to gather feedback on health reviews. The Children in Care Councils won the award of 'Young volunteer of the year' at the Chairman of Bath awards 2016, of which they are rightly very proud. Their commitment to supporting young people in care is highly commendable.

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

49. Children requiring adoption receive an outstanding service. Adoption is afforded a very high priority and is actively considered at the earliest opportunity for all children who need permanence away from their families. An exemplary understanding of children's needs ensures that they are expertly prepared to live securely with well-assessed and carefully matched adopters.
50. Highly effective planning takes place without delay, and children looked after with a plan for adoption move swiftly to live with their adoptive parents. Timeliness, in relation to the Department for Education adoption scorecard measures, has been consistently strong, and the recent performance of the local authority indicates further improvement to exceed government expectations in most measures. A proactive service-wide commitment ensures that adoption services for children continue to improve using all national initiatives and newly developed adoption practice. Social workers in all services understand the importance of their timely contribution to adoption work.
51. The relatively low numbers of children adopted each year are proportionate and reflect the comparatively small size of the local authority. Adoption is appropriately considered as part of a spectrum on which permanence is achieved for children, alongside connected family members and special guardians. There is a clear commitment to ensuring adoption is considered as a permanence option for all children including: older children, aged five years and above; children with special needs or disabilities; children from Black and minority ethnic communities; and larger groups of brothers and sisters. Within this small group, the wide range of needs of children who are adopted demonstrate the effectiveness of the local authority's ability to identify effectively all children whose needs are likely to be best met through adoption. Fostering to adopt is well embedded in practice and has recently been used effectively to enable the early placement of children with their older brothers and sisters.
52. Social workers take a proactive approach to planning, often completing child permanence reports before the court considers an application for a placement order. Adoption plans are approved swiftly through scrutiny by the permanence panel. Following panel approval, early, urgent and comprehensive efforts are made to find potential adoptive matches for children. The local authority is astute in recruiting sufficient adopters to meet local need. Consequently, matches are made swiftly with adopters who are approved by the local authority and those approved by other agencies. Searching and matching activity considers each child's unique needs, and uses all available local and national avenues effectively.

53. Most children with placement orders are matched or linked with adopters, apart from a very small number of brothers and sisters for whom active and extensive family finding is underway. There are very few recent instances of adoption decisions being reversed or of placements breaking down, reflecting the careful planning and the excellent support provided to families once a child lives with adoptive parents. A small number of adopters approved by the local authority have had to wait longer periods for a suitable match. This is appropriate and is due to specific individual factors, and it reflects purposeful matching of children to the right families.
54. Adopters receive excellent preparation and support both before and following children's placements with them. Bath and North East Somerset is part of a highly regarded local consortium that facilitates access to high-quality preparation programmes. Child permanence and adoption placement reports are of a consistently excellent quality. This provides the permanence panel, potential adopters and children, when they are older, with detailed, informative and sensitive accounts of their early birth parent periods. These reports also clearly explain the reason for recommending adoption as the preferred option. The assessment of adopters' suitability is timely, thorough and evaluative. Strengths are prominently considered through skilful analyses of vulnerabilities and earlier life experiences, equipping adopters well to meet children's needs.
55. The permanence panel benefits from an experienced and knowledgeable chair who encourages effectively the active participation of a diverse list of core members and promotes well-informed, probing questions of social workers and prospective adopters. The panel chair and all panel members benefit from an annual appraisal with a close focus on improving their knowledge and development. Thorough scrutiny and quality assurance arrangements are embedded through purposeful management supervision, the oversight of the permanency panel and the agency decision maker.
56. Social workers' assessments of whether brothers and sisters should be placed together or apart are informed by evidence-based options analyses, demonstrating a high level of knowledge and understanding of children. Assessments are underpinned by knowledge of children's development and attachment theory, highlighting relevant research and professional literature. Stringent efforts are made to encourage adopters to maintain contact with brothers and sisters and other birth family members, when this is in the children's best interests. The significance of appropriate contact is well understood by social workers and adopters through high-quality preparation and training.
57. Life-story work is of an exemplary standard, demonstrating care and sensitivity in producing illustrative, creative and engaging books. Later-life letters are accurate, detailed and written with care, sensitivity and affection by social workers. The exceptional quality is consistently applied.

58. Adopters told inspectors that they harboured no illusions about the demands, complexities and rewards of adoptive parenting, and that the purpose and relevance of the intensive enquiries were made clear to them by highly skilled, supportive and experienced social workers.
59. The range, availability and quality of adoption support are exceptional, with 23 families currently accessing services and support. A designated clinical psychologist offers readily available, bespoke packages of support for children and adopters. The medical adviser provides appropriate help in the preparation and support of adopters during the matching and post-placement periods. This enables adopters to fully appreciate the possible short- and longer-term implications of children's earlier histories. Adopters value highly the importance of understanding children's behaviours, with a strong emphasis on attachment and therapeutic reparenting. The adoption support fund is used creatively to support 44 families. For example, this funds an attachment group attended by six adopters. Adopters consistently described exceptional, 'fantastic' support by social workers and other disciplines, from the point of application through to post-adoption support.

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

60. Services for care leavers in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) require improvement to be good. The quality of pathway plans is too variable, with too little focus on timescales or contingencies to drive plans effectively for young people. Visits to young people are not always proportionate to need, and planning for a very small number of young people with complex or challenging circumstances is not sufficiently proactive.
61. Services for care leavers include many aspects of sound practice, involving effective interventions leading to positive outcomes. A small, stable team of family support practitioners in the Moving On team provides well-considered guidance and advice to care leavers. Most practitioners have a good knowledge and understanding of the young people whom they work with, and respond creatively and energetically to meeting most young people's practical needs. Caseloads are manageable and generally well balanced.
62. Young people spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the influence and effectiveness of their workers, not least in terms of securing them with accommodation, finance, education, training or employment. Young people told inspectors that they feel safe in their accommodation and understand their rights and entitlements, but did not feel well supported to develop important life skills such as staying healthy or budgeting. Few of the young people spoken to were aware of their health histories, but all had access to a doctor and dentist.

63. Some young people with previously chaotic lives are now enthusiastically following career paths which are a close match to their talents and aspirations. In 2015–16, and in the five years previously, more B&NES care leavers than nationally were attending higher education. Care leavers' various successes and achievements are celebrated annually at a high-profile, well-attended awards event.
64. The quality of planning and coordination is variable. Not all visits to young people are proportionate to the presenting need and some do not take place quickly enough following significant events. Consequently, young people going through difficult times do not always obtain the support that they need at the right time. Case recording is not always sufficiently detailed to provide a clear record of how an issue has been resolved or risks have been responded to. In particular, practitioners do not consistently put risk management plans in place for a small minority of care leavers when their needs escalate. Managers are not yet effective in identifying these shortfalls or driving plans that ensure that these young people have the right support. (Recommendation)
65. Most young people are directly involved in, and contribute to, their pathway plans and, in the examples seen, they often include positive feedback about the help that they receive from the family support practitioner. The majority of pathway plans are reviewed at the required six-monthly intervals, but some are delayed. The quality and effectiveness of pathway plans are too variable. Most include a large amount of narrative information, which is often very perceptive, but others lack detail and do not explore young people's social and emotional needs in sufficient depth. Irrespective of the extent of their information, plans are not consistently specific, concise or realistic and, in some cases, there are no timescales for actions to drive planning for individual young people. (Recommendation)
66. Pathway plans are not always in place at the point at which young people's cases transfer to the Moving On team or, when they are in place, they are not always meaningful and with clear, deliverable actions.
67. Care leavers currently have only informal arrangements for commenting on and improving the quality of service that they receive. The local authority has recognised the value of establishing and providing resources for a regular, formal care leavers' forum, but the arrangements planned to create one are only at a very early stage.
68. The very large majority of care leavers are housed in suitable accommodation. The amount of accommodation available in B&NES for care leavers is limited. Nevertheless, the local authority has very good working relationships with a wide range of social and private housing providers in Bath and Bristol, and in adjoining counties, to ensure that a range of accommodation options are available to young people. Despite the local authority's policy not to use bed and breakfast accommodation, this has been used on two occasions in the past six months. Although this was the last resort and robust risk assessments

were undertaken, it remains an inappropriate option for young people. New emergency accommodation provision has very recently become available in the Bath area. This is designed, in part, to help to ensure that bed and breakfast accommodation is not used at all.

69. Family support practitioners are proactive in building relationships with young people, and they demonstrate tenacity in maintaining contact when young people start to disengage. Because of these persistent efforts, the local authority is in touch with a high proportion of its care leavers.
70. The local authority has a long and improving record of retaining care leavers in their foster placements post-18 years. Currently, there are 12 young people who are staying put with their foster carers after the age of 18, and a further eight who are in the process of doing so. Young people benefit from these arrangements, which offer support and stability into adulthood.
71. Young people spoken to by inspectors were particularly complimentary about the specialist support that they had received or were receiving from the local authority's dedicated employability team. The care leavers' employment team ensures that young people have particularly good access to work experience, work placements and the apprenticeships available within the local authority. A high proportion of care leavers (75%) from age 19 to 21 are currently in education, employment or training, which is much higher than statistical neighbours and nationally.

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|---|-------------|
| <b>Leadership, management and governance</b>  | <b>Good</b> |
| <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The senior leadership team in Bath and North East Somerset (B&amp;NES) is dedicated, creative and effective. It rigorously ensures continuous oversight of strategic plans to monitor progress and gauge outcomes for children. Leaders and managers have a clear overview of frontline practice, which has been instrumental in the development of good-quality services to children looked after and those with a plan for adoption. Further work is required to improve the overall quality of planning for children in need of help and protection and care leavers. Consequently, these services require improvement to be good.</p> <p>Leaders are successful in identifying areas of transformation and ensuring change that delivers maximum impact. The enhanced and innovative early help, for example, is highly effective in preventing the escalation of need. The Willow project offers an immediate first-line response to children at risk of child sexual exploitation and a cross-service pool of expertise. Children’s needs have a consistently high profile politically and in overarching planning. The local authority is a strong advocate for children looked after, and places a strong emphasis on direct work and time spent with children. Corporate parenting is an area of strength, with an embedded strong commitment and sound understanding of what children need, from social workers through to elected members.</p> <p>Arrangements for commissioning are outstanding. A comprehensive, fully integrated commissioning framework ensures that there is a wide range of carefully monitored services. Children are involved in shaping commissioning arrangements, and their views are fully integrated into the procurement and commissioning process. Sufficiency is well understood.</p> <p>Partnership working is very strong, with clear accountability from the director of children’s services, the chief executive, B&amp;NES Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board and elected members. Effective working relationships with partners, including health and police, ensure that children are well supported and safeguarded.</p> <p>Increasing demand for services has had an impact on capacity, particularly in the duty, the child in need and the court teams. Consequently, caseloads are in excess of set targets for a small minority of social workers in these services. The senior leadership team ensures robust and regular oversight of staffing capacity and caseloads. Active work is underway to address staffing shortfalls, with several vacancies recently recruited to but with the staff not yet in post. However, where shortfalls are evident, supervision and management oversight are less effective, and, as a result, managers are not yet consistently effective in driving all children’s plans and preventing drift and delay.</p> |             |



## Inspection findings

72. Effective close working between senior leaders and elected members ensures that children are given the highest profile. There is an equally strong commitment across political, strategic and operational roles, including cross-party political support for children's services. Elected members take their role of corporate parents very seriously. The highly active corporate parenting board ensures that they hear directly from children, in addition to the advocacy service, as independent representative for children. The terms of reference for the corporate parenting board are explicit that all councillors carry the role of corporate parents and all receive the minutes from corporate parenting group meetings.
73. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the local communities and their needs. This is informed by a regularly updated joint strategic needs assessment. Commissioning arrangements and sufficiency strategies are fully aligned to ensure that services meet the needs of children and families. Commissioning managers are active nationally and regionally, and ensure that best practice is adopted and promoted. Strong partnership working ensures that commissioning work benefits from economies of scale. Through a joint agency panel and pooled budgets, children's social care, education and the clinical commissioning group determine the best resource for each child with complex needs.
74. Senior leaders, supported by the B&NES LSCB, demonstrate a strong commitment to tackling risks associated with missing and child sexual exploitation. Extensive cross-agency work has taken place to develop a comprehensive problem profile to support agencies in understanding the extent of potential risks for children in the local community. Regular information-sharing meetings focus on the disruption of offenders and mapping the offending activity. Child sexual exploitation and risks associated with children going missing are understood well, supported by a range of effective services. This includes the dedicated multidisciplinary service, the Willow project, which provides a highly effective early response to children at risk of child sexual exploitation.
75. Since previous inspections, the local authority has worked closely with a voluntary organisation to understand and embed issues of culture and diversity better throughout its interventions with children and families. This work has been subject to regular audits, the most recent of which, in 2017, demonstrates considerably strengthened practice and an improving picture, with diversity now almost always addressed. This learning was disseminated to staff through a 'learning from culture audit' presentation.
76. The Health and Wellbeing Board ensures that an appropriate profile is given to children's needs. Since 2016, its dedicated sub-group has taken a lead in driving progress for children, including, for example, active monitoring of the child and adolescent mental health service transformation plan.

77. Partnership working in B&NES is good. The local authority has a positive working relationship with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. Links between senior leaders and the B&NES LSCB and partner agencies are strong. The director of children's services frequently meets the chair of the B&NES LSCB, the chief executive and the lead member of the council. These collaborative arrangements, combined with a shared commitment to driving improvements, ensure a safe line of sight to practice.
78. At all levels across the organisation, there is a healthy environment of challenge. This is seen at practitioner level, through the objective challenge from the independent reviewing officers; externally, through the rigorous and conscientious questioning of the well-informed scrutiny panel; and directly, through the assertive senior and junior Children in Care Councils, and at a management level, such as the caseload challenge meeting.
79. The local authority has been proactive in seeking to ensure that young people have a voice and are supported effectively. This is evidenced through the use of independent advocacy advice for children who present as homeless to help them to explore whether they want to become accommodated. A further example is the excellent advocacy provided by a voluntary organisation which ensures that children are supported to question and challenge for themselves the services that they receive. A culture of curiosity and ambition has led to the local authority undertaking its own research, such as the current, complex 'toxic trio' project.
80. The local authority uses a clear and comprehensive suite of data and performance reporting documents to ensure that it knows what is happening for children. All measures and outcomes are known but, following a change in the preferred information systems used, there are currently some gaps, including not being able to provide aggregated monthly data reports easily and a lack of an overarching dashboard to assist frontline managers with live data. Additional resources are in place to ensure that this happens in a timely way, and that the local authority has a clear plan and timescale for full implementation.
81. An annual staff survey is used to gauge the experience of staff members. An overarching quality assurance framework has recently been developed to streamline the wide range of quality assurance activity that already takes place. There is a clear line of sight between feedback, learning, training and improvement. Any learning from complaints, including the style and tone of response, for example, is met through additional training for managers by the principal social worker.
82. Exemplary workforce planning and support ensure that there are very able and highly capable practitioners. Effective staff support and training have led to a consistently stable workforce and strong staff retention. A broad range of career development opportunities are available for both newly qualified and more experienced social workers. Reflective discussion is facilitated through

regular 'journal clubs' and the effective role of the principal social worker. The vacancy rate and agency rate remain relatively low, with a staff turnover rate of 11% in 2016–17, showing strong performance compared to regional and national averages. Staff consistently reported to inspectors how much they enjoy working for B&NES.

83. Supportive and reflective supervision takes place regularly, for the vast majority of staff. There is clear management oversight on the majority of casework. There is a clear policy on caseloads, and these are kept under active review at senior management level by 'caseload challenge' meetings, led by the divisional director, and at an individual level through supervision. Caseloads are manageable, for the majority of staff, but there has been a rise in activity across the service. Consequently, a small number of staff have caseloads that exceed the desired maximum size set by the local authority. In some parts of the service, where pressures are more evident, the quality of supervision and management oversight is more variable. This is particularly evident in respect of the oversight of child in need and pre-proceedings work, where managers are not consistently effective in driving plans, which results in drift and delay for a small number of children. (Recommendation)
84. The senior leadership team ensures robust and regular oversight of staffing capacity and caseloads. Active work is underway to address staffing shortfalls, with several vacancies recently recruited to, but with staff not yet in post.
85. Senior managers take proactive action to address gaps in capacity in the context of constraints across the wider council. The divisional director ensures equity across the service by keeping caseloads under review through his regular caseload challenge meetings. Staff and frontline managers are not left unsupported, but the pressures on capacity mean that good practice does not always have the right conditions to flourish.

## The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

**The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good**

### Executive summary

The Bath and North East Somerset Local Safeguarding Children Board (B&NES LSCB) is good. The board fulfils its statutory responsibilities well. It has secured strong commitment from key statutory agencies to monitor safeguarding practice across the area. Governance arrangements are clear, and the effectiveness of safeguarding services is comprehensively evaluated and monitored.

The board is large, but it is appropriately constituted and well attended by key partners, including lay members and voluntary agency representatives. The chair of the board is highly valued by partners and is an experienced independent chair. He is also the chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board. The interface between the boards enables joint priorities to be set across safeguarding arrangements and ensures that services to both children and adults are targeted according to local need.

Engagement with local children is a strength. Children actively participate in the work of the board, and their views inform the scrutiny of local services.

Audit activity is well embedded. Learning from audits, serious case reviews and serious incidents is identified well and shared effectively across the partnership. The board consistently demonstrates robust challenge between board members, and this has been effective in key areas, for example in improving early help provision, reducing repeat referrals and improving the timeliness of assessments of children.

The delivery of a comprehensive and well-evaluated training programme is a strength of the board, and this is ensuring that safeguarding in B&NES is well understood and promoted as the responsibility of all partners. While scrutiny of performance information is effective and enables a sound analysis of performance in most key areas, the board does not currently receive information on the timeliness or frequency of visits to children by social workers. The annual report is mostly comprehensive, but it does not currently incorporate key learning from the private fostering or independent reviewing officer annual reports, or provide a rigorous assessment of the performance and effectiveness of these services.

Arrangements to respond to child sexual exploitation and children who go missing are effective and well monitored. However, the impact of some partners' practice in raising local awareness has been slow in some significant areas, for example the engagement and training of local hoteliers and some taxi drivers.

## Recommendations

86. Strengthen the range of performance information provided to the board, to include the timeliness of visits to children following the point of referral, as well as the statutory visiting frequency.
87. Ensure that the annual report incorporates findings from the private fostering annual report and the independent reviewing officer annual report, and provides a rigorous assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services.
88. Strengthen current arrangements for partners to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation through licensing activity in Bath and North East Somerset.

## Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

89. The Bath and North East Somerset Local Safeguarding Children Board (B&NES LSCB) meets all its statutory duties and holds agencies to account effectively to ensure that children are safeguarded across the area. Governance arrangements between the board and the local authority are well embedded. The independent chair is experienced and well respected, and he has ensured that the key functions of the board are carried out to a consistently good standard.
90. The chair of the board also chairs the Adult Safeguarding Board. This ensures that the exchange of information between the boards is purposeful and well targeted. This has helped B&NES LSCB to focus on improving adult services' contribution to safeguarding children. For example, the board has recently strengthened protocols for information sharing between agencies in cases where adults' and children's social care and mental health services are involved.
91. The chair meets regularly with the director of children's services and the chief executive, and has established clear links with the health and wellbeing board. The board benefits from the highly effective support and commitment of the business manager, who ensures the coordination of the board's activities.
92. The board is appropriately constituted and has three active lay members who participate effectively and add value to the board's scrutiny and monitoring function. The seven sub-groups are appropriately aligned to the board's statutory responsibilities and priorities, which are set out in the business plan and local needs assessment. The dedicated children in care sub-group further ensures that safeguarding responsibilities for children looked after are an equal priority and are well monitored. Attendance by partner representatives is mostly good, with sufficiently senior professionals attending to be able to commit their agencies to appropriate action. Representatives from voluntary agencies attend the board regularly and are well engaged in the board's activities.

93. Partners consistently describe a culture of openness and purposeful challenge, with a well-driven and sustained focus on safeguarding performance across the area. This is an important strength, facilitating effective arrangements for partners to hold one another to account and to challenge performance robustly. This ensures that outcomes for children in the area continue to improve.
94. Engagement with children is a priority and a strength, and the board actively seeks the views of children through the senior Children in Care Council and youth forum. The board has recently developed a joint Adult and Children Safeguarding Board website, following consultation with children. The website includes a child-friendly section. The board has also developed a child-friendly annual report that was designed by local children. Children have been involved in recruiting board members and the new chair, as well as setting priorities and areas of challenge to partners.
95. Thresholds are reviewed regularly, and are well applied and understood across the partnership. The application of thresholds is robustly analysed by the board through the policy procedure and performance sub-group, for example through the scrutiny of performance information. Recent activity has focused on repeat referrals and the numbers of referrals that lead to no further action, alongside audit activity and feedback from partners. Partners confirm that thresholds are appropriately set to meet the needs of local children who need help and protection.
96. The response to children who go missing and children at risk of sexual exploitation are the key priorities of the board. The board has very recently revised the child sexual exploitation strategy and protocol. These have been disseminated across the partnership effectively. The board makes good use of performance information and data to monitor performance and to identify local trends. Ongoing audit work in respect of children who go missing or who are at risk of sexual exploitation has resulted in shared learning and effective multi-agency action plans to raise awareness and ensure that practice is good across the partnership. While the board's focus on child sexual exploitation and missing is good, some awareness-raising activity by partners has been slow. Only taxi drivers approved to transport children who are actively involved with the local authority are required to attend child sexual exploitation training as part of the licensing process. Work to raise awareness of sexual exploitation with hoteliers has only recently been implemented. (Recommendation)
97. The performance information received by the board is mostly comprehensive and has facilitated effective challenge across the partnership. However, the board has identified that key data is missing, particularly regarding key health information, and is currently strengthening the dataset to incorporate this data. However, the board does not currently scrutinise performance regarding how quickly children are seen from the point of referral or the timeliness of social work visits to children. (Recommendation)

98. The board clearly challenges partners' performance and practice following effective scrutiny of data, audit outcomes, performance information and feedback. The chair maintains a robust challenge log which demonstrates effective tracking of concerns and monitors progress regarding the impact of challenges made. Recent challenge has identified poor police attendance at strategy meetings and child protection conferences, the use of 'place of safety' beds in police cells and the timeliness of assessment sign-off by managers. The board's challenge is response to these issues has resulted in sustained improvements.
99. Arrangements to initiate serious case reviews are clear and appropriate. The board has commenced one serious case review in the past year. The learning from local and national serious case reviews is routinely identified, and the lessons are disseminated effectively to frontline staff. The impact of this in the past year is lies in the improved risk assessments for children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, better consideration and recording of the voice of the child in case records, and more effective arrangements to support children with autism. The understanding and application of the procedures have been tested effectively by the professional practice sub-group.
100. Audit activity conducted by the board is broad and well targeted, and results in improved outcomes for local children. Auditing is extensive and has involved the review of a wide range of practice issues, including, among others, the voice of the child, the quality of child protection plans and the experience of children looked after. Partners engage well in audits, resulting in shared learning about strengths and weaknesses and appropriate actions, such as the delivery of training and policy reviews. Plans are reviewed and monitored to ensure positive and sustained impact. Corporate parenting responsibilities have been reinforced through the work and focus of the board. Audit activity across education establishments is purposeful and results in demonstrable improvements in safeguarding practice, such as improved information sharing.
101. The board regularly and systematically reviews and revises policies and procedures on a rolling programme. They are mostly of a good quality and are monitored by the sub-groups to measure impact. Lessons from audit activity, serious case reviews and other learning mechanisms purposefully inform policy development. Policies and procedures are accessible through the B&NES LSCB website.
102. The reported incidence of female genital mutilation, radicalisation, and modern slavery and trafficking in B&NES is very low or nil. However, the board has ensured that protocols for each are clear, comprehensive and disseminated effectively. Learning is gathered from other areas, and the board uses this to ensure that local awareness is sustained and tested.
103. The provision and delivery of high-quality, multi-agency training by the B&NES LSCB and the training and workforce development sub-group is a significant

strength. This is underpinned by a clear and well understood learning and improvement framework. The board provides graded training across the partnership in core areas, as well as themed training identified from a range of learning. The board benefits from a well-funded training budget and a highly skilled and experienced virtual training team which delivers high-quality training. Training is evaluated effectively, both prior to the training and at three months after training is completed, with a clear focus on ensuring that attendees can evidence how training has informed their practice. Quality assurance arrangements for trainers are comprehensive, and ensure that training is well targeted and of high quality. The board has developed clear training standards to ensure that single-agency training meets the B&NES LSCB standards.

104. Arrangements for the child death overview panel (CDOP), shared across a number of local authorities, are comprehensive and well established. Partners are well engaged, and the panel fulfils its core functions robustly and effectively. Members of the CDOP report regularly to the board and the annual report is comprehensive, focusing on key learning and on themes from the scrutiny of child deaths. For example, the panel has identified and disseminated learning regarding the risks associated with concealed deaths, as well as the need for high-quality interpreting services. The panel has developed learning material for practitioners. Learning is cascaded effectively by partners and is translated into both multi-agency and single-agency procedures.
105. The B&NES LSCB annual report 2015–16 and business plan 2015–18 is a lengthy document, which has an impact on its accessibility, but it does set out most of the activity of the board, as well as the impact of this activity on practice. A brief executive summary and young person’s guide to the LSCB and annual report are also published to promote accessibility. The report includes a comprehensive analysis of performance information across children’s services, with well-identified strengths and areas for development. However, the report does not sufficiently incorporate findings and learning from the private fostering annual report or the independent reviewing officer annual report, or provide a rigorous assessment of the performance and effectiveness of these areas. (Recommendation)



## **Information about this inspection**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The inspection team**

Lead inspector: Donna Marriott, HMI

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