

Lincolnshire County Council

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board¹

Inspection date: 22 October 2014 – 12 November 2014

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The overall judgement is that children’s services are good

The local authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for good. It is Ofsted’s expectation that, as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.²

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

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

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

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

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The local authority

Summary of findings

Children's services in Lincolnshire are good because:

Leadership and management

- Governance in Lincolnshire is effective and partnership arrangements are robust. The local authority has developed a sound infrastructure across the county that supports vulnerable children well.
- The local authority has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It is a learning organisation and is strong in many areas of performance management. A greater focus on quality assurance process to assess the impact of practice on outcomes for children, would strengthen this further.
- A strong approach to corporate parenting is evidenced by the far-reaching developments promoted for children looked after and care leavers. This could be further strengthened by an increased focus on the educational attainments of children looked after and outcomes for care leavers.
- An effective early help strategy, supported by considerable investment and joint commissioning arrangements, means that families are being offered the right help at the right time. The quality and organisation of early help services ensures that families are receiving highly effective support.
- The views of Lincolnshire children and young people feature strongly in the planning of service improvement.
- A comprehensive workforce strategy ensures that practitioners have access to good quality training and supervision. A recent investment in additional social work posts is helping to assure manageable caseloads.
- A child sexual exploitation (CSE) strategy and action plan has only recently been developed. It is based on a thorough analysis of the prevalence and nature of CSE in Lincolnshire. This has led to increased awareness-raising activity and the establishment of a multi-agency team who share intelligence about perpetrators, provide advice to other practitioners and work with young people most at risk. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this strategy.

Adoption

- High priority is given to children achieving timely permanence through adoption, with 68 Lincolnshire children being adopted during the past 12 months. Children are well prepared for their new families and offered effective adoption support.

Social work practice

- The voice and involvement of children in Lincolnshire has been enhanced by the introduction of the Signs of Safety model and communication tools. There is good engagement in case work, child protection conferences and statutory reviews.
- Thresholds are understood and appropriately applied at each stage of the child's journey. Most children receive timely, good quality assessments, and when they are the subject of court proceedings these usually conclude within 26 weeks. A small minority of children looked after do not have their assessment updated when their circumstances change and so do not have plans that accurately reflects their needs.
- Children only become looked after when it is their best interests, and the majority of children looked after are able to live with foster carers and within the local authority boundary. Some services for children looked after are particularly strong with innovative features, for example, Cafcass Plus and the Extended Contact pilot.

Care leavers

- The Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service is highly effective in keeping in touch with all care leavers. Personal Advisers maintain frequent contact with care leavers who are unstable and exhibiting chaotic and risky behaviours. Pathway plans for some care leavers do not ensure that all of their wide ranging needs are addressed.
- There is a wide range of services, including mental and physical health, employment and education workers and a parenting support worker, who work in the service to improve the health and engagement of care leavers. Many interventions reduce risks, gradually building engagements in services and improving outcomes.

What does the local authority need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

1. Cease the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year-olds and young people leaving care, and ensure that there is suitable accommodation for all care leavers.

Areas for improvement

Leadership and management

2. Undertake a review of quality assurance activity with regard to work with individual children, and increase the emphasis of auditing activity on the impact of practice on outcomes.
3. Improve the rate of progress and education outcomes for children looked after by strengthening the quality of their personal education plans and maximise the impact of pupil premium funding on raising achievement for both children looked after and adopted.
4. Maximise learning from complaints made by children looked after by ensuring that they are analysed to identify trends and inform service improvements.
5. Ensure that recent improvements in the work on child sexual exploitation relating to both prevention and protection are subject to review and evaluation, so that impact can be understood.
6. Ensure that all relevant staff working with children are able to identify the early signs of sexual exploitation, and that they are confident in their use of relevant risk assessment tools.

Social work practice

7. Review and strengthen the process and recording of child protection section 47 enquiries to ensure that: expectations for multi-agency checks are defined; their findings are clearly recorded by social workers; summaries and recommendations are explicitly linked to this information and to the assessment undertaken; and management decision-making points are clearly defined.
8. Ensure that where an assessment concerns the impact of domestic abuse it is informed by the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment undertaken by the police.
9. Ensure that robust assessment, planning and information sharing are in place for all children looked after which is relevant to their current needs and changing circumstances. This should include children who are returning home, those where placement planning and identification are current issues, and those moving to a new placement or leaving care.
10. Introduce a chronology tool that is fit for purpose, consistently used and reliably tells a child's story, so that social workers and managers are accurately informed in their assessments and decision-making.
11. Ensure that 16 and 17 year-olds who are homeless or potentially homeless understand their entitlements and that, for those who do not remain with their friends or families, their legal status is considered and clearly recorded in assessments.

12. Ensure that social work reports are made available to families sufficiently in advance of child protection conferences and that all key reports are available prior to children's looked after review meetings.

Care Leavers

13. Improve the quality of Pathway Plans so that they feature carefully considered objectives with specific actions and timescales to measure progress and ensure that their review benefits from meetings which are appropriately chaired.
14. Ensure that where looked after young people aged 16 and 17 years of age leave care before they reach 18 years of age, the leaving care decision is informed by the young person's readiness and preparation.
15. Take action to reduce offending rates of care leavers, and those who receive a custodial sentence.

The local authority's strengths

16. Safeguarding is a key priority and is underpinned by effective governance and strong partnerships.
17. Early help services for children and families are well targeted and coordinated. Children's centres and schools play an active role in delivering services for children.
18. The local authority's Troubled Families programme, Families Working Together, has effectively engaged and 'turned around' families involved with the service.
19. When child protection concerns are identified, children are quickly safeguarded. Strategy meetings lead to swift action. Initial child protection conferences are held promptly and child protection conferences are mostly well attended by agencies. Advocacy for children is used well throughout the child protection process.
20. The recently introduced 'Signs of Safety' social work practice model is leading to improved engagement with children and parents.
21. Lessons learned from serious case reviews and recommendations for the local authority are informing training programmes and are helping to shape social work practice.
22. The effective use of the Public Law Outline and the Cafcass Plus pilot has helped to improve the timeliness of care proceedings.
23. Children looked after are well supported by a sound infrastructure that includes some innovative services, for example Cafcass Plus and the Extended Contact pilot.

24. Children looked after are seen regularly by their social workers and report that they feel listened to and have good relationships with them. Care plans are regularly reviewed and permanency for children is considered early in the planning process.
25. The local authority is successful in ensuring timely adoption for children when this is in their best interests, and children in Lincolnshire are adopted quicker than the national average.
26. The local authority's commissioned care leavers' service is good at keeping in touch with young people who have left care and ensuring that they receive good quality support services.
27. The local authority has an effective workforce development strategy. A comprehensive package of training and support is offered for new social workers. Multi-agency training is offered to social work staff and those in other agencies who deliver the early help offer.

Progress since the last inspection

28. The last Ofsted inspection of Lincolnshire's safeguarding arrangements was in June 2010 when the local authority was judged to be outstanding for overall effectiveness. That inspection was undertaken under a different framework and focused on safeguarding processes rather than on outcomes for children.
29. The current Director of Children's Services has been in post since 2012 and, since that time, a very solid foundation has been established to support children in need of early help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The success of the local authority in ensuring that most children looked after live in in-house placements has been extremely cost effective without compromising on quality. This has contributed to funding being available for workforce and service development, some of which is creative and innovative.
30. Partnership working is an asset in this local authority, which is self-aware and clear about its vision for vulnerable children who live in the county. Performance management, though strong in many areas, could be further improved by ensuring that quality assurance has an increased focus on outcomes for children.
31. Much work has been done to ensure that the provision and coordination of early help in Lincolnshire has continued to progress. This has meant that the local authority has been able to continue to focus its specialist services on the children who need them most. The integration and co-location of staff, and the relatively new advisory and consultant roles, have further strengthened the support provided to local families in need.

32. The implementation of the solution-focused Signs of Safety model across children's services, and as a model that underpins early help, is beginning to change thinking and practice, particularly in the prevalence of the voice of the child in assessments. Implementation has been supported by a training programme that has been widely taken up by staff across the children's partnership.
33. The two areas for development highlighted in the 2011 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services have been addressed. However, the client record system, which was highlighted in the 2010 Ofsted inspection as a problem, is acknowledged by the local authority as being no longer fit for purpose, and there is a plan to replace it in April 2015.
34. The learning from serious case reviews has been good, with significant improvements being made in the timeliness and quality of strategy discussions, the quality of case supervision and the effectiveness of escalation processes. The consistency and recording of multi-agency checks within child protection enquiries, identified through the Family V serious case review, still needs further attention to be good and so continues to be an area for improvement.
35. The last Ofsted inspection of Lincolnshire's services for looked after children was in June 2010. The local authority was judged to be good. All the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection have been addressed and good progress has been made. There is a good range of support services available for children.
36. Services for children looked after for whom adoption is the plan are exceptional; children are prepared well and most move to their families without delay.
37. The local authority has commissioned Barnardo's to deliver its care leavers' service for some years now, and it ensures that care leavers receive a good service through a robust contract monitoring process.

Summary for children and young people

- Families receive help very quickly when they have problems. They often go to their local children's centre or get adults in school to help them. The people who want to make things better for children organise meetings with families to plan what needs to happen to help families' with their problems.
- Social workers know children well. Some children may have a change of social worker because they move jobs or leave the area but this does not affect too many children. Social workers take the time to listen to children and their families. This means that children can get the help they need quickly and they understand what is planned for them.
- If children need to be cared for by Lincolnshire County Council, the social workers make good plans for them. They ask children for their views and, for most of them, the right decisions are made. Where children will live and with whom is decided as quickly as possible. Social workers try very hard to keep children with their brothers or sisters or other family members. If they need to be adopted, this is done quickly and almost all children adopted find the right family.
- If a child is in care there is a specific service to help them do well at school. Most of them go to a good school, behave well and attend regularly. Some children are not yet making enough progress or getting good enough results. The Council has been asked to check the quality of children's education plans and to make sure that children and young people get all the support they need to succeed.
- As children grow older, many want to set up their own home. A participation group has produced some creative tools to assist young people, such as a video and a smartphone app. Personal advisers help young people to find good accommodation and encourage them to continue to learn, train or get a job. There are still some who are not working or in training and a few who get into trouble. The staff need to improve pathway plans to make sure that all young people leaving care are well prepared to lead successful lives.
- The Director of Children's Services and politicians, as well as staff, really listen to young people, and they are influencing decision-making. The Young Inspectors, Voice4Choice and the Care Leavers' Participation Group represent young people and they challenge adults to make things better for children and young people.

Information about this local authority area³

Children living in this area

- Approximately 140,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Lincolnshire. This is 19.5% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 17% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 13.8% (the national average is 18%)
 - in secondary schools is 11% (the national average is 15.7%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 10% of all children living in the area, compared with 21.5% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are White-Eastern European and Dual Heritage (School Census Jan 2014).
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 8.2% (the national average is 18.7%)
 - in secondary schools is 5.5% (the national average is 14.3%).

Child protection in this area

- At 31st March 2014, 3,724 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 3,383 at 31st March 2013.
- At 31st March 2014, 342 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is an increase from 294 at 31st March 2013.
- At 31st March 2014, 22 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from 6 at 31st March 2013.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31st March 2014, 606 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 43.4 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 585 (42.1 per 10,000 children) at 31st March 2013. Of this number:
 - 35 (or 5.8%) live outside the local authority area
 - 31 live in residential children's homes, of whom 22.6% live out of the authority area

³ The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local un-validated data where this was available.

- 5 live in residential special schools 4, of whom 20% live out of the authority area
 - 412 live with foster families, of whom 6.6% live out of the authority area
 - 32 live with parents, of whom 15.6% live out of the authority area
 - 8 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
- there have been 68 adoptions
 - 40 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 277 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 2.5% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 8 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - 19 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates six children's homes and one secure unit. Ofsted judged six of them to be good or outstanding in their most recent inspection.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children's Services has been in post since March 2012.
- The Chair of the LSCB has been in post since October 2009.

⁴ These are residential special schools that look after children for fewer than 295 days.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children and families in Lincolnshire are helped by the right services at the right time. The organisation and quality of early help services, particularly children’s centres, targeted youth support and Families Working Together (the Troubled Families programme), are highly effective. Practitioners working in universal services receive good advice and support from Early Help Consultants and Early Support Care Co-ordination. They see supporting families as a shared responsibility and they understand and apply thresholds appropriately. This has helped to maintain the proportions of re-referrals to social care and of children who become the subject of child protection processes below the national averages.</p> <p>The recording of child protection enquiries requires improvement to become good, and the absence of a useful chronology tool means that it is more difficult for those who need to make a decision quickly to understand the important events in a child’s journey. The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment undertaken by the police is not routinely shared and this potentially affects the quality of information received and acted upon by social care.</p> <p>Early help and social work assessments are strong and help is provided quickly through the Team Around the Child, Child in Need and Child Protection planning and review processes. Where necessary, timely strategy discussions take place and always include the police, health and social care. Decisions made are safe and appropriate. The introduction of the solution-focused Signs of Safety model has enhanced the involvement of children in Lincolnshire, with good engagement with children in direct work and in child protection conferences. The local authority has demonstrated its commitment to learning from feedback by the way it is utilising the Principal Child and Family Social Worker and the Munro Champions to work alongside young people, to make sure that feedback drives improvement. Children over 10 years old who are subject to a child protection conference are always offered an advocate.</p> <p>Through careful analysis, partners now understand the scale of the problem of children going missing and sexual exploitation in Lincolnshire and services are good overall. Good quality direct work is taking place with children who are at risk of sexual exploitation. Though good progress has been made in educating professionals in this area of practice, further sustained work is needed to ensure that this knowledge is applied in identifying risk. Services to children who go missing or who are at risk of sexual exploitation have previously been inconsistent; although the current response has markedly improved through the establishment of dedicated</p>	

services, these developments are recent and their impact has not yet been evaluated.

38. Well-trained local practitioners understand current processes, apply appropriate thresholds and provide highly effective support to local families. Early help assessments have increased year-on-year since the process was introduced in 2008. Between April and September this year, 1,298 early help assessments were undertaken that progressed to a Team Around the Child (TAC) plan of support. Of these, 73 per cent were closed in the same period, because either the needs of the child had been met (32%), or because they had reduced to the point where they could be met by a single agency (41%). This is evidence that a large majority of children had been successfully supported through this process.
39. The Early Help Steering group (EHSG) is successfully driving improvement. There is considerable multi-agency investment in a wide range of services to provide prompt support to families. The joint financial contribution of schools, through the schools forum, demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring that early help services make a positive difference to the lives and well-being of children and families in Lincolnshire. Referrals to children's social care are low and reducing. The low rate of repeat referrals shows that support provided through the TAC process is working well. Partners report significant improvement, particularly over the past few months, and access to early help services is simple and straightforward. The step up and down process works well, resulting in families being provided with the right level of support at the right time.
40. Children's centres, targeted youth support and the Families Working Together (FWT) services are central to ensuring effective provision and intervention. Services are easily accessible and are improving outcomes for children, young people and families who require additional support. Health visitors work effectively with children's centre staff to support vulnerable families with young children. Health assessments at age two are used to identify issues as early as possible. There is good sharing of data between health services and children's centres, including live-birth data, leading to prompt support for young parents. Older young people have easy access to school-based nurses who offer drop-in counselling sessions.

41. There is good take-up of the LSCB training programme amongst early help practitioners and schools, including training on child sexual exploitation. A recent conference aimed at raising awareness was particularly successful, with staff reporting increased confidence in identifying risks of sexual exploitation among young people. Multi-agency training is offered to all schools and covers issues such as E-safety, digital citizenship, crime and alcohol awareness. Some powerful learning experiences, such as the play 'Chelsea's Choice', reached over 5,000 young people. Specific programmes of support are targeting young people in special schools. These aim to address specific challenges encountered by the most vulnerable young people, such as emotional well-being, homophobic bullying, racism and, more generally, how to keep safe in their day-to-day life in and out of school.
42. The co-location of 0–19 teams has improved communication and promoted integrated practice. Inspectors saw many examples of highly effective early help practice which prevented escalation to statutory services. There is good access to services for children with a disability and special needs through the Early Support Care Co-ordination (ESCO) service as well as specific support for families from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups provided by the Ethnic Minority & Travellers Education Group (EMTEG).
43. Early help assessments are of good quality. Services and actions are clearly focused on improving and monitoring outcomes for children. The appointment of early help consultants has been a significant development. Their work is improving practice and ensuring consistency. The role and expertise of the early help consultants (EHC) have been particularly welcomed by schools. The EHCs are supporting lead professionals to ensure that assessments are clear and that families understand them. They also check that practice is of high quality and that staff in universal services receive timely advice and support. Schools particularly welcome their offer of individual and group supervision, and this is leading to more children being supported well at an early stage.

44. Overall absence rates of all children in Lincolnshire match the national rate for primary and secondary schools. Children and young people missing from school are successfully tracked and located. In 2013/14 a total of 857 referrals were made and 87% of cases were successfully closed. The register is not closed until the child is found. A range of data from different sources, including from the police, is used to track young people, and schools have guidance on the actions to take following withdrawal of a child from school. About half (77 out of 134) the children and young people who receive less than 25 hours of education attend the hospital school. The others access a bespoke programme with alternative providers who are quality assured by the local authority. The authority maintains a list of children and young people who are electively home educated, and monitors the quality of their education effectively, including liaising with 11 to 16-year-olds from traveller families. In August this year, 443 young people were registered as home educated and all but one had suitable provision. Additional risk assessments are undertaken for children who are children in need or subject to a child protection plan, as well as those children who are not seen or where families refuse visits.
45. Young people age 16 or 17 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are supported well by the Families Working Together Youth Homeless Project, with skilled mediation proving to be particularly effective in helping young people to remain with their friends or family. Of the 125, 16 and 17 year-olds, referred to the project between January and September 2014, 15% were referred for a social work assessment because of the complexity of their needs. Where such an assessment concludes that a young person is a child in need then they are accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Thirteen were initially placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, for an aggregate total of 56 nights. The early help assessments seen by inspectors did not demonstrate that their entitlement to be assessed under section 17 and section 20 of the Children Act 1989 had been explained to them. This is a weakness.
46. Where professionals or members of the public are worried about a child, they receive a helpful and well-co-ordinated response from the Customer Service Centre. Call advisors screen contacts and provide clear information and advice. The need for consent is clearly explained. Early help advisors, who are qualified social workers, screen referrals and provide good quality specialist consultation to professionals with concerns. Time is taken to help the referrer decide how the family can be supported. A head teacher told inspectors that, 'We are never, ever turned away'. Feedback is consistently provided to referrers, and any disagreement about thresholds is resolved through discussion or escalation processes. Referrals are quickly progressed to area teams for assessment. Almost all contacts, which meet the threshold for referral, result in a social care assessment, and almost all assessments result in an offer of help. Thresholds for children's social care are clear and are consistently and thoughtfully applied.

47. The criteria used by the local authority to identify whether a referral should be responded to by a social worker within 24 hours did not include situations where a child is at risk of domestic abuse or because they have gone missing. When identified by inspectors, the local authority took immediate action to remedy this shortfall.
48. The response by the emergency duty team to concerns about children outside office hours is good. The team has access to appropriate training, and opportunities to work alongside daytime colleagues, which helps to keep their practice up to date.
49. Once the referral is transferred to a locality team children are swiftly allocated and managers make clear and well-recorded decisions about what social workers need to do next. Social care assessments are undertaken by qualified social workers and are of good quality in a very large majority of cases. They include family history, strengths and needs, and they explore the important aspects of children's lives. They are completed in a timescale that meets the needs of the child.
50. In a small minority of cases seen, children were not always seen quickly enough following referral and, though this did not adversely affect the children concerned, potentially it could have done. The local authority has taken decisive action to strengthen their oversight of practice in this area.
51. Social Workers spend time getting to know children, young people and their families. As a result, they have a good understanding of children's lives and experiences. Case records demonstrate that they are exploring family homes and are tuned into children's feelings and worries. Social workers use Signs of Safety 'three houses' tools to help children to explain their worries and dreams and this is helping them to understand children better. Social workers speak warmly and confidently about the families they are working with and are rightly proud when children's lives improve. Inspectors were impressed with the direct work being undertaken by the children with disabilities team, for example, using iPads to communicate with disabled children.
52. The police do not routinely share the specific risks highlighted through their Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment and this potentially affects the quality of information received and acted upon by social care.

53. Where there are concerns that a child may be at risk of harm, strategy discussions and meetings are convened in good time in the very large majority of cases, including out of office hours. These meetings always include health, police and social care and records are comprehensive. This is an area of good practice. For disabled children, specialist health representatives contribute to these meetings, ensuring that the child's complex needs and histories are taken into account. Discussions include consideration of past harm, and social workers use 'danger statements' to make clear to parents the things that agencies are most worried about. Plans are safe and appropriate and decisions are clear.
54. The recording and analysis of child protection enquiries and decision-making points are not always clear. In a small minority of assessments seen, a coherent account of what information other agencies have shared, and how this has contributed to the risk assessment, is missing. This potentially affects the quality of the analysis and resultant plan.
55. Where help is needed, the family does not have to wait until the end of the assessment for this to be provided. The consideration of ethnicity is evident and the views of children and parents are consistently included. Children in need have a clear and useful plan outlining the help to be provided, and these plans are regularly reviewed. Social workers in Family Assessment Support Teams (FAST) work closely and creatively with co-located targeted support teams to ensure that families get the help that is likely to make the most difference to them.
56. The use of chronologies is inconsistent and key information was missing from many of the chronologies seen by inspectors. Social workers say that the integrated children's system (ICS) tool inhibits them in this task and this is acknowledged by the local authority, which has taken steps to ensure that this will be addressed when they implement their plan for a new client information system in April 2015.
57. When a decision is taken that the assessment should include a full child protection enquiry, these are undertaken in good time and children are consistently seen alone. Decisions are taken appropriately to progress to a child protection conference, and where they do not, the child's support needs are fully considered including the need for an early help service, if the decision is taken not to offer a social work service.
58. The involvement of children in child protection conferences is strong, and advocates help to ensure that their experience is positive. Conferences are well chaired, discussions are detailed and risks and strengths are discussed, leading to the right decisions being made.

59. In a small minority of cases, social workers' reports to child protection conferences were not shared with parents in enough time for them to be read and understood before the conference. This meant that parents were not sufficiently prepared for the meeting.
60. Core groups are regular, well-attended and are ensuring that agreed actions are progressed. Where change is not achieved, parents are appropriately challenged, particularly where there are concerns about neglect. Outcomes for children have improved or are improving in the majority of cases.
61. A very small minority of child protection outline plans do not provide a helpful summary of what needs to change and required actions. The limitations of the local ICS system mean that the plan agreed during the conference is not updated when the detailed plan is agreed, other than in the Core Group minutes. The local authority is aware of this and the issue will be resolved when their plan for a new client information system is implemented in April 2015.
62. Children who go missing from home or care receive a good response from the social workers in the Barnardo's Step-change service. Since the team was established in June 2014, 390 missing episodes have been screened and 231 return interviews have been undertaken. The team, together with the police missing person's coordinator, are carefully analysing missing and absent episodes to ensure that children who need a return interview receive one. An appropriate criterion that considers risk factors is used to determine priority. Social workers in this team describe themselves as a 'bridge', enabling young people and their families to receive the right help. Services for children at risk of going missing or of CSE are planned to be further strengthened through the co-location of the Step-change service with the multi- agency CSE team.
63. There was a significant underestimation of demand in the commissioning of the Barnardo's Step-change service, reducing its initial effectiveness. In one case, difficulties contacting a child led to a delay of 22 days in a return interview being undertaken. This meant that the assessment of need was delayed. This had been addressed by the local authority prior to the inspection, and the capacity of this service has been enhanced to meet demand.

64. Children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation are well supported by the very recently established multi-agency Safe team. The team includes staff from the police, the youth offending service and children's services (social care and family support), and it oversees and engages with those young people in Lincolnshire who are most at risk of sexual exploitation. Although it is too early to see the full impact of this service, case work demonstrates that it is beginning to make a difference. The creative tools developed by family support workers have brought structure and focus to this work. Inspectors saw examples where police action had disrupted the activities of alleged perpetrators, for example through the use of abduction notices. The regular Safe team tasking meeting identifies high risk cases and then tracks them, shares intelligence and identifies themes; meeting membership also includes the named nurse for vulnerable children and young people.
65. Social workers in other service areas are not yet consistently considering the risk and impact of CSE early enough in their assessments and plans. All partner agencies have identified CSE Champions, and a four-level training programme is being delivered across the partnership, but it is acknowledged that the task of educating and training all relevant professionals has been huge and that there is still work to do to address what one manager described as 'pockets of limited knowledge'.
66. Domestic abuse is addressed well in assessments and plans, with appropriate and accessible help being provided to victims and children, leading to positive outcomes. Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) arrangements are well-embedded, with good multi-agency attendance. Managers ensure that actions are progressed within five days of the meeting.
67. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are managed well with robust criteria, effective communication between members and consistent multi-agency attendance. The 'Stop Abuse' initiative, where police can quickly report an incident of concern relating to a child, has led to 800 notifications to the public protection unit between January and September 2014.
68. Where there are concerns that a professional or carer may present a risk to a child, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) ensures that allegations are investigated thoroughly. Risk is understood and appropriate action is taken. The involvement of LADOs in training and auditing activity is further strengthening this area of work.
69. There were 22 children living in private fostering arrangements in 2013–14. These children receive a good service, with statutory visits by dedicated social workers in the FAST teams taking place within timescales and assessments reflecting children's needs.

70. Feedback from families is sought through a variety of means, including surveys. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is working with Munro champions, who represent locality teams, and with young people to ensure that the learning from feedback is informing improvements in social work practice. The Transition Board, which includes senior managers from Adults Services, Children's Services, Health, and Commissioning, is informed by feedback from the Shadow Transition Board comprised of disabled young people.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children looked after by Lincolnshire County Council benefit from a range of strong and innovative services. They only become looked after when it is in their best interests. A large majority of children looked after are able to live with foster carers and within the local authority boundary.</p> <p>The local authority effectively applies the Public Law Outline and has successfully reduced the timescales by which care proceedings are concluded through the local family courts. Permanence is secured for the majority of children without delay.</p> <p>Social workers know the children they work with well and appropriately assess their needs. They ensure that the views of children looked after inform planning decisions taken during their review meetings, which they are encouraged to attend. Feedback from children and their families is utilised to drive improvements in services.</p> <p>For a small minority of children, assessments are not updated when their circumstances change, particularly when they return home. This means that the care plan does not always reflect their needs. Health assessments and social workers' reports are not always made available for children's review meetings. This means that the review is not always fully informed and able to plan for children effectively.</p> <p>Many children looked after attend a good or better school. The very large majority attend regularly and behave well. Education outcomes require further improvement, particularly in writing for primary school pupils and in the proportion of young people in secondary schools making the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics. Children looked after have access to good support for their emotional needs and have access to specialist services for substance or alcohol misuse, or if they go missing, or are at risk of child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Adoption performance against national indicators exceeds good. Adoption for all children is considered at the very earliest point in planning, and effective tracking monitors their journey to permanence. Innovative and creative practice means that very few children wait too long or have their plans changed from adoption.</p> <p>Care leavers have stable and enduring relationships with their personal advisers and the majority of care leavers are effectively prepared for their transition to adulthood. Pathway plans do not always consider the full range of needs of care leavers and an insufficient choice of accommodation for care leavers means that a very small number, often those in crisis, are living in bed and breakfast accommodation,</p>	

which is unacceptable. Currently 11 care leavers are in custody.

71. Children become looked after appropriately following robust assessment of their needs, including their need for protection. Decisions are timely and appropriately approved by managers.
72. Children looked after benefit from support from social workers who take the time to build meaningful relationships and seek to fully understand their views; this is an area of strong practice. Feedback from the majority of children spoken with during the inspection was positive about their relationships with their social workers, and indicated that they felt their views were sought and taken into consideration.
73. The local authority correctly applies the Public Law Outline (PLO) to ensure that children and families are effectively supported through pre-proceedings work. This includes the use of clear pre-proceedings letters, family group conferences and parallel planning to ensure that children are able to live in appropriate placements that meet their needs, staying with their birth family where this is possible. The majority of children who return home benefit from robust assessment and planned support to ensure that their move home is safe and successful. Timeliness of pre-proceedings work is ensured through good quality professional relationships and oversight of case work. However, cases are not tracked prior to an application being made to the court, which potentially could lead to delay or drift.
74. In a small minority of cases seen by inspectors, assessments have not been fully updated prior to children returning home and plans do not all contain sufficiently clear information regarding the services to support these re-formed families.
75. Whilst the majority of children looked after live in stable placements, in which they can build lasting relationships with their carers, there has been a drop in performance in this area since 2010 when it was 72%. In 2012–2013, 69.8% of children looked after remained in the same placement for more than two years, which was still higher than the average for statistical neighbours (68%) and England (67%). However, the local authority's data for the first six months of 2014–15 show stability to have fallen further to 64.4%. The local authority has recently commissioned an independent consultant to research the reasons for this decline in performance and, in the interim, resources have been invested in improved psychological support to foster carers. Reviews of foster carers caring for teenagers, the group most vulnerable to breakdown, are also held more frequently to ensure that the right level of support is offered.

76. Children spoken to during this inspection confirmed that they understand what they can expect from their social workers and carers. The local authority has been proactive in this area, and provides children with a 'coming into care pack' that explains what being looked after means, how to complain, and about the children looked after pledge. The local authority is also currently developing a phone app as an addition to this pack for children looked after to use on their smartphones. It is a highly imaginative tool that allows a live link to their social worker; provides locality information on health and leisure facilities; and enables children to prepare information for their looked after child review and provide feedback following the meeting. It includes a pen picture of their allocated social worker and diary reminders of important events. All data on the app is securely and automatically uploaded to ICS. This is a good practice example.
77. The majority of children looked after have care plans that ensure timely decisions and actions are taken to enhance their lives. Their emotional health needs are supported through the effective use of Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires; a new dedicated looked after Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) team and access to the online counselling service known as 'Kooth'.
78. Whilst the majority of children have timely initial health assessments, this is not yet achieved for all children looked after, and the quality and timeliness of some still require improvement. The local authority and health colleagues are aware of this and have trained a pool of GPs to undertake the initial health assessments. There is a system to quality assure and improve these assessments and plans.
79. Young people misusing drugs and alcohol have access to commissioned services to help them reduce risks associated with this. Safety plans are used for children looked after to identify areas of risk while they are looked after. These plans also include information about how professionals should respond to critical events, such as going missing, and how to help children to minimise risk.
80. Between June and October 2014, 34 looked after young people went missing a total of 85 times. Return interviews were undertaken with children on 63 occasions. Children looked after who go missing are prioritised by the Barnardo's Step-change service. Information is shared with the child's social worker in order to be able to better understand risks and patterns. Where a risk of sexual exploitation is identified, the multi-agency Safe team provides good quality support to looked after young people. Four looked after young people are currently receiving targeted help from this service. Any incident of bullying is dealt with by the school and as part of review meetings.

81. Education outcomes for children looked after require improvement. The most recent validated results (2013), for a small cohort of 43 pupils, show that 85% of children looked after in primary schools made the expected progress in reading, which was above the national figure for children looked after (77%). In mathematics, 75% of pupils made the expected progress, in line with the national average (74%). However, in writing, 75% of pupils made the expected progress, which was below the national average of 81%. Only 22 children took the tests in 2014. Un-validated results for 2014 show that in reading 67% of pupils made the expected progress and just over half made the expected progress in writing (52%) and in mathematics (57%). These results are well below those for all pupils in Lincolnshire.
82. Key stage 4 results fluctuate year-on-year due to the small cohort size. In past years, GCSE results compared favourably with those of similar authorities and the national average. Progress was also comparable. The proportion of children looked after achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics (26%) was above average in 2012 but dropped to 16% in 2013 in line with the national average for children looked after (15.3%). Of the 51 young people who took their GCSEs in 2014, 17 entered care in Year 11 and over a third attended a school for children with special needs. The attainment gap between pupils who are looked after and their peers remains wide. In 2014, a small proportion of looked after pupils made the expected progress in English (23%) and mathematics (30%). Latest published results for 2014 show that in Lincolnshire 15% of young people achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics against the national average of 12%.
83. Children looked after attend good alternative provision in the Teaching and Learning Centre. Almost all receive the minimum requirement of 25 hours of education each week, and those who do not are carefully tracked and supported. They follow part-time and bespoke timetables to improve their attendance and engagement in learning. A very small number of young people only study for a few hours each week. Staff are relentless in trying to find creative ways to support their learning. A good development is the catch-up initiative in Year 12, specifically designed for looked after students who did not achieve a GCSE in English and mathematics. All Year 11 looked after students are encouraged to continue their education or training as part of the raising participation age initiative. The majority of young people attend college or a school's sixth form. A few follow work-based learning courses. The latest data show that, of the cohort of 51 young people who left school in July 2013, six young people were not in education, employment or training by May 2014.

84. Schools are very complimentary about the support and advice provided by members of the Virtual School's Looked-After Children Education Service (LACES). The LACES team and the recently appointed head of the virtual school are increasingly effective in monitoring the impact of pupil premium funding to ensure that children looked after are supported well and make better progress in their learning. The very large majority (75%) of pupils attend good or better schools. Pupils are not moved unnecessarily and, in the past academic year, the small number of looked after pupils attending less than good schools made similar progress to those in good schools. The LACES team frequently checks the quality of personal education plans and challenges schools' designated teachers to improve these further.
85. The plans usually provide a good overview of pupils' attendance, welfare and emotional well-being. However, targets contained within personal education plans (PEPs) for progress and attainment are often too general, and the impact of pupil premium funding on raising achievement is not always clearly demonstrated.
86. Schools report that exclusions are used as a last resort and are challenged by the LACES team. The Director of Children's Services is informed promptly of any exclusions. No looked after pupil placed in a Lincolnshire school was permanently excluded in 2013/2014. Two pupils placed out of county were permanently excluded that year. There are no permanent exclusions to date for this academic year. Rates of fixed-term exclusions follow the national trend. These are mostly due to persistent disruptive behaviour and serious incidents. In the last academic year, a total of 59 young people placed in Lincolnshire schools and 29 in out-of-county schools received at least one fixed-term exclusion. Members of the LACES team monitor exclusions and attend re-integration meetings in schools to offer strategies and advice.
87. Attendance is good overall and compares well with that of all pupils. An individual absence plan is completed for all pupils whose attendance falls below 85%. Performance is reported to children's services senior managers and to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Senior leaders and elected members have a good oversight of children's achievement.
88. Children looked after access a range of extra-curricular and recreational activities. These include confidence-building events and cultural or sport outings. Foster carers are clear about their delegated authority to organise these activities for the children they care for. The Duke of Edinburgh programme offers young people many volunteering opportunities and challenging activities, and enhances their future potential and options through completion of this nationally recognised award. Currently 9% of children looked after are undertaking the award and the Corporate Parenting Panel is seeking to promote these opportunities more widely.

89. The views of children are a strong feature in planning and review arrangements. Children Looked After are provided with a range of opportunities to participate effectively in meetings about them. This includes the use of advocacy, pre-meetings with their IROs, participation forms, active participation within meetings and letters to children who have chosen not to attend certain meetings to update them of the discussion and outcomes. Statutory reviews are chaired well in a style that ensures that all relevant matters are considered whilst also delivering the meeting in a style that supports and encourages input from the child, their family and carers, and other professionals.
90. Social workers' reports for review meetings are not sufficiently detailed and lack robust analysis of placement planning. Assessments are not consistently updated when children's needs, risks and circumstances significantly change, especially when a decline is noted. Safety plans are not consistently reviewed when the child's circumstances change. This means that current needs and risks are not always being considered and planned for effectively to lead to a reduction in risk for the child. Between April 2014 and September 2014, 26.3% of social workers' reports for the review and 30.9% of health assessments were not available at the review meeting.
91. Contact arrangements for children looked after are thoughtfully and appropriately managed to ensure that children are able to maintain and build relationships with their families that can be sustained over time where it is safe to do so. Foster carers are often actively involved in the practical arrangements to ensure that children have good contact with family members, including providing transport and liaising with other foster carers to ensure that brothers and sisters can stay in touch where this is agreed in their care plan.
92. Children who are placed outside the local authority are living in placements that were judged to be at least good by Ofsted. They have positive relationships and regular visits with their social workers and have planned access to appropriate health and education services to meet their needs. The local authority has clear notifying arrangements to inform other local authorities when children are placed outside Lincolnshire.
93. The majority of children and young people are successfully placed within Lincolnshire and the majority of children looked after live in foster placements. The local authority's unvalidated September 2014 data records that 75.5% of children looked after are living with foster carers. The use of external placements is very low and this compares very well against other local authorities' performance. The use of external placements is primarily for children with complex needs, and these placements are commissioned on an individual basis to meet identified need.

94. A recently formed recruitment team has been established to streamline the process of recruiting both foster carers and adopters. The checks and assessments of foster carers are completed within timescales and meet statutory requirements. The assessments are analytical and identify the strengths and areas for development. The supervision of carers is robust and focuses on the needs of children in placements and how well the carers are managing these needs. The majority of foster carers have completed the required qualification, although the number of connected and kinship carers completing this remains a challenge. The approval status of foster carers and their progress is reviewed annually by their supervising social worker. Children and young people's views inform foster carers' reviews, and examples of this were seen. All reviews are signed by team managers to ensure management oversight.
95. The sharing of written information between social workers and those caring for children looked after is not sufficiently timely in all cases to ensure that children's new carers fully understand the child's needs and experiences and therefore how to provide them with safe and appropriate care.
96. The local authority reviewed all cases for children looked after without a clear permanence plan in 2013; plans for the majority of these children and young people have now been progressed. For children and young people in long-term foster placements, the option of permanence through special guardianship orders (SGOs) has been explored. There are currently 174 children living with their special guardian. The arrangements to support SGOs are well embedded through assessing support needs and providing means-tested financial support. SGO's are further strengthened through the use of supervision orders and child in need services where this is relevant and in the best interests of children.
97. The majority of children are able to live with their permanent family without delay. The local authority has a range of creative initiatives to support children in achieving permanence. This includes Cafcass Plus and the Extended Contact fostering option. Children are prepared well for planned placement moves through discussions and visits with their prospective carers prior to moving into the placement.
98. For children currently entering care proceedings, assessments and decision making are carried out within clear timescales which meet the child's needs; the conclusion of final proceedings meets or improves on the expected target of 26 weeks. Excellent relationships have been developed between the local authority, Cafcass and the judiciary and this is supporting the very strong practice in securing swift action and shorter court timescales for the vast majority of children. The local Judge reported 'there are terrific working relationships ... they present their concerns, have their independence, and cooperate in the best interests of children.'

99. Social work reports and assessments for court applications are good quality; the local judge has seen significant improvement in quality over the past 18 months and now rates them highly. This has been supported through the seconded case manager from Cafcass working with legal services and practitioners to drive improvements. The local authority recognised the success of this seconded role and recently established it as a permanent post.
100. There is a well-established council for children looked after and care leavers called Voices for Choices (V4C). There is an executive group of young people that meets monthly and three area-based sub-groups that meet quarterly. All four groups contribute to the local authority's 'Big Conversation' programme, which brings together young people, elected members and managers from children's services and Barnardo's Leaving Care Service to develop and improve the services that children and young people receive. Inspectors attended a very positive meeting, with those young people present having a clear role in participating and influencing service delivery to support other children looked after and young people. The local authority is effectively accountable to V4C and they routinely update and respond to issues raised by young people. V4C is linked with the Corporate Parenting Panel and the children and young people affirm that they are listened to and feel that they influence changes in the local authority. For example, the recently redesigned ePEP and review forms have been developed with young people and a 'coming into care' smartphone app has been designed with their input and there is a plan for this to be launched imminently.
101. Professionals take into account the ethnic background of children looked after and endeavour to provide for their diverse cultural, ethical or religious needs. Social workers are vigilant about children and young people's understanding of English, and translators are readily accessible. At school, children looked after access one-to-one tuition funded through the pupil premium. This helps to improve their speaking, reading and writing skills. Additional support and advice is available through the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Education Team (EMTET).
102. The use of life story work to help children looked after to understand their histories and early experiences requires improvement to ensure that all children benefit from this important work. The local authority is aware of this and is currently in the process of recruiting to two full-time posts which will focus on this area of work.

103. The use of placements made under regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, whilst significantly improved over the past 12 months, is an area acknowledged by operational managers to be an 'evolving picture'. There remains a degree of confusion for a small number of social workers about the correct use of the regulation that concerns the temporary approval of a connected person and this is being addressed by the local authority through the reinforcement of a recently issued procedure.
104. The structure of the social care service has been designed in a way to minimise changes of social worker. A small minority of children have experienced frequent changes of social worker and this has hampered the development of effective relationships with their social worker. This has resulted from a mixture of staff promotion and sickness as well as from staff leaving the service.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is that it is outstanding

105. Adoption is considered very early in the planning process for all children. The local authority effectively twin tracks children's plans, and there is purposeful drive to achieve timely outcomes for children to live with adopters. For children with final care plans for adoption, dedicated children's adoption workers focus exclusively on developing their plans. There are excellent examples of potential links made between prospective adopters and children during their assessment due to close working in this team. This has resulted in panel considering approvals and matches at the same panel, achieving timely permanence for children.
106. Securing permanence through adoption is a high priority. In response to a dip in performance in 2012–2013, decisive action was taken to understand this picture, commissioning a diagnostic report and a subsequent action plan. This action plan has been well executed and has led to improvements in the structure to support adoption work and redefine practice to achieve timely outcomes. This is underpinned by robust adoption policy and a clear understanding within children's services of the shared aims for continued adoption improvement.

107. Performance on the Department for Education (DfE) adoption scorecard and the most recently available DfE data demonstrates that this authority performs well against the expected national targets. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family is 393 days, which is significantly better than the England figure of 546 days. The authority has robustly analysed its performance on the timeliness of 232 days between receiving court authority to place and achieving a match to an adoptive family. This figure is slightly higher than the national average of 224 days. This resulted from a slip in timeliness for a few children, which the authority has now addressed. Current performance for the number of children adopted is on an increasing trajectory, with 68 children adopted in the last 12 months.
108. The number of children waiting longer than the expected timescale to be matched with adopters is very low. Currently there are 26 children waiting for an adoptive placement, and only seven of these have been waiting longer than the expected timescale. These children are closely monitored by senior managers to ensure that they do not experience drift and delay. There are currently four children where the plan for adoption has not been achieved, and for these children alternative permanence options are in progress. Where there has been delay, there has been no adverse impact on the children.
109. There is effective recruitment of adopters and a year-on-year increase over the last three years, from 30 adopters approved in 2011–2012 to 50 approved in 2013–2014. Assessments are timely: the average number of days between application and approval is 175 days, which compares favourably to the figure for England of 217 days. Adopters report very positively on their experience from initial contact through to being recommended for approval at panel.
110. Specific recruitment campaigns target adopters with the right skills, such as those able to care for brothers and sisters and older children. In 2013–2014, out of 53 groups of brothers and sisters assessed as needing placements together, this has been achieved for the vast majority. Achieving permanence through adoption for these children whilst placing them together remains a focused priority for the dedicated recruitment team. There are fast-track, priority processes to respond to such enquirers. There are currently 13 approved adopters waiting for a match, and activity is progressing with 10 of these to explore links with specific children.

111. The Adoption Reform grant has been used effectively to drive improvements and create extra posts to enhance recruitment activity, progress adoptions and strengthen adoption support. This includes a family finder coordinator, who is integral to effectively monitoring and securing matches for children. This role actively supports close links with the East Midlands Consortium, voluntary adoption agencies and the National Adoption Register to progress timely wider searches for adopters for children. Adoption activity days are proving successful in securing adopter-led matches for some older children and those with complex needs. There is regular scrutiny through weekly meetings of the progress of all children who do not have a confirmed match within 12 weeks; senior managers review their progress at a dedicated panel. This is a recent addition to provide support and challenge to practice to find creative solutions and avoid delay.
112. Fostering to adopt is in development. There are currently two sets of foster carers specifically recruited to foster to adopt, but no children have yet been considered a suitable match for the fostering to adopt placements. Twelve interested people attended a recent information day on fostering to adopt to learn more, and it is the plan to continue developing this option as part of securing permanency at an early stage and avoiding a second move for children.
113. Children are extremely well supported to prepare them to live with their future families. Social workers are skilled in direct work and use a variety of tools which are meaningful to the child to help them transfer their attachments to their new family. This helps children to settle quickly, and the very low numbers of disruptions, only one child in 2012-13, shows that children are well prepared and matched. There is effective scrutiny and challenge by an experienced and well-established panel and agency decision-maker. The analysis of adoption performance is captured within the annual report to inform ongoing improvement.
114. Social workers prepare excellent life story books for children placed for adoption. These are individual and personal for each child and support children sensitively to understand their family history and identity. Later life letters are equally child-centred and provide children with a factual and sensitive account of their life history.

115. Adoption support is effective and provided at different levels of need. Children and adoptive families do not experience delays in accessing or receiving support as this support is not limited post adoption order. It is provided by a discreet team of workers who are qualified and trained in therapy and psychotherapy and offer direct short-term and long-term interventions for children and adopters. There are many examples of highly effective work to help children to make sense of their situations at key stages of their lives. For adopters, this support equips them with theory and supportive strategies to respond effectively to the child. This reduces stress in relationships and supports stability. There are currently 29 children receiving adoption support.
116. Birth parents are able to access independent counselling through Birth Ties, and parents are increasingly using this service for support. Support for adopted adults is timely, and the team responded to 91 requests for birth record counselling during 2013–2014 in addition to 40 referrals from birth parents and 31 enquiries from birth relatives.
117. Not all schools are utilising the pupil premium to support adopted children and families, which means that some adopted children do not get the right support in school.

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

118. Contract and performance management of the Barnardo's Leaving Care Service by the local authority is effective. This includes close and frequent scrutiny of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or not in suitable accommodation. Personal advisors receive regular supervision and have manageable caseloads averaging 20 young people. This allows them to spend sufficient time supporting young people. They work alongside transition social workers in the children looked after teams, who hold statutory responsibility for completing pathway plans of children looked after aged 16 to 18 years. This arrangement allows personal advisors to construct effective, enduring relationships from an early point with looked after young people entitled to a leaving care service.
119. Risks to care leavers are generally well assessed. Safety plans and risk assessments are regularly updated in the majority of cases seen. The service is effective in staying in touch with all care leavers, including a significant minority who live outside the county. Staff have intensive levels of contact with care leavers who are experiencing a chaotic period, using effective relationships to stabilise behaviours.

120. Half of all pathway plans seen by inspectors were judged as requiring improvement, with plans lacking specificity, particularly concerning independence skills development. The quality of plans seen is generally better when young people are in stable placements, particularly those who are 'Staying Put'. The plan format was designed by young people, and their views are strongly evident. A scaling system allows young people to self-assess and plot their progress on key outcomes with their personal advisers.
121. Pathway Plans seen were less effective with care leavers who were in unstable, chaotic phases. It is recognised that engaging young people in structured planning when they are in turbulent periods of their lives is challenging, but careful, detailed, specific plans and timely reviews are particularly vital for this group of care leavers. The Leaving Care Service does not have a policy outlining how biannual Pathway Plan reviews for relevant and former relevant young people will be chaired. Rectifying this would improve the quality of the review and help to ensure that the delivery of the plan is effective.
122. Most care leavers (92%) in Lincolnshire live in suitable accommodation and the majority of care leavers live in supported lodgings or housing schemes when they reach 18 years of age. All care leavers spoken to by inspectors said that their accommodation was safe and pleasant. Staff routinely complete a property risk assessment to determine 'suitability'. A dedicated supported lodgings worker is increasing the supply of supported lodgings providers, predominantly in family homes.
123. Thirty-five care leavers remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements and there is a commitment to increase the number of 'Staying Put' and supported lodgings placements to allow more young people reaching 18 years of age to remain in family settings. Young people not in suitable accommodation, which includes 11 young people in custody, are closely monitored and tracked through the contract monitoring process.
124. Bed and Breakfast placements are still used by this local authority for a very small number of care leavers. It is recognised that these placements are usually made when young people are presenting challenging, disruptive and aggressive behaviours, though such provision is unlikely to meet their needs. Two care leavers were in bed and bed accommodation at the time of the inspection and one 17-year-old young woman was recently placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for three months before an appropriate alternative could be identified. Lincolnshire has recognised the need for more supported lodging provision, particularly for care leavers with complex needs, and a commissioning programme has commenced to attract suitable providers.

125. Transition planning for disabled care leavers is highly effective in Lincolnshire, and commences with adult services at an early stage. Strategic and operational arrangements for transition planning are comprehensive and integrated. Young people with additional needs who do not meet the threshold for adult services are also comprehensively supported through highly effective, integrated joint transition planning.
126. The health needs of care leavers receive effective attention. Care leavers are supported to register with universal services and to attend their appointments. A dedicated nurse works alongside personal advisers to signpost and support care leavers engaging with targeted and specialist health services. Care leavers access contraception card schemes, pregnancy testing, chlamydia screening and teenage pregnancy services through well designed service pathways. Good engagement with the substance misuse service was a particularly prominent feature in cases seen. Care leavers with identified mental or emotional ill health are well supported by two CAMHS practitioners who engage solely with care leavers. A health passport is not currently available to care leavers, though this is currently under development.
127. The majority of care leavers are effectively supported, through phased approaches, to build their independence skills. A range of methods are used, including individual work with personal advisors and preparation undertaken in supported lodgings or housing settings. An accredited scheme for the attainment of independence skills is being developed. Foster carers are being encouraged to provide skills training for young people in their care aged 16 years and over.
128. There are 19 care leavers who are parents. Most of these young people receive additional support from a dedicated parenting support worker in the Leaving Care Service, who works alongside personal advisers to ensure effective intervention to develop and sustain good parenting skills.
129. The majority (61%) of Lincolnshire care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET), which is close to statistical neighbour and national averages. The local authority has invested in three dedicated posts in the Leaving Care Service to work alongside personal advisers to increase participation levels in good quality programmes, tailored to the needs of the young person. Care Leavers who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) are closely tracked and the reasons regularly reported and reviewed.

130. There is an effective two-day, and a longer 13-week, work preparation programme. An established care leaver apprenticeship scheme in Lincolnshire has been operational since 2007. The preparation programme entails placements with employers, with the objective of building skills and confidence in order that dropout rates in subsequent apprenticeship programmes are reduced. There are 45 young people on preparation programmes and 20 young people on apprenticeship schemes. Apprenticeships are sought both with the local authority and a range of employers across the county.
131. Lincolnshire has a strategic commitment to increase participation rates for its Care Leavers in both these schemes. Care Leavers on work preparation programmes are incentivised with a £10 per day payment in addition to their benefit payments. A 'Care To Work' quality mark has been awarded to Lincolnshire, demonstrating the high standards of service supporting care leavers in their journeys towards employment.
132. Most care leavers who completed Year 11 school studies in 2014 are in education, training or employment (86%). Seventy per cent are attending further education or sixth forms at schools. Six care leavers are in some form of training. Fourteen per cent of 16 and 17 year-old care leavers are 'NEET'. There are 19 Care Leavers attending university, and they are supported by bursaries and assistance with accommodation in holidays.
133. A dedicated service supports 64 unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers. There is an effective range of services, some of which are co-located, supporting this group of care leavers quickly into suitable accommodation, education and employment. Care leavers spoke positively of the support they receive. Unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers are effectively supported to engage in education, training and employment. Fifty-eight out of 64 Care Leavers in this group are either working or attending college and three attend university.
134. The proportion of children looked after aged 16 years who remain looked after when they reach 18 years of age is significantly lower in Lincolnshire than in other authorities. In March 2013 this was 49%, compared with statistical neighbour and England averages of 66% and 68% respectively. There are currently 24 young people who left care before their 18th birthday. The local authority has yet to analyse the reasons for this and so does not know whether young people are leaving care prematurely.

135. Care Leavers' participation, involvement and influence within the Leaving Care Service is good. An active participation group meets regularly and strongly influences important aspects of service design and provision. Recent initiatives have included the production of some highly innovative tools to assist their peers in acquiring independence skills. This includes a video, and a 'smartphone app', both of which will be launched imminently. Care leavers themselves have developed the Care Leavers Pledge in Lincolnshire, and they have also been involved in the redesign of the pathway plan and review forms. Basic and more detailed written information is provided on care leaver rights and entitlements and they are offered an independent advocacy service. Care leavers achievements are celebrated at annual award ceremonies, which they both value and enjoy.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>A strong senior leadership team ensures that the effective use of resources is ensuring exceptional early help services. There is effective governance in Lincolnshire and partnership arrangements are robust. A recent self-evaluation shows elected members and senior managers have a good overall understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their work with local communities.</p> <p>Regular meetings take place between the Chief Executive, the DCS and the Chair of the LSCB. Links between the key strategic groups and boards are clearly evident and are making a difference. The Corporate Parenting Panel is both active and aspirational for children looked after and care leavers, though it has not yet delivered improvements in all aspects of their lives.</p> <p>Priorities are clearly identified, with safeguarding being a key local authority priority. Progress is carefully tracked and monitored. Elected members on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are conscious of their role in improving services and, through their task and finish groups, have developed a good understanding of front line services.</p> <p>A joint-commissioning process is in place and is effectively managed through the Children’s Services Commissioning team. Commissioned services, such as the Barnado’s Step-change and the Care Leavers Service, are meeting some challenging targets as well as experiencing a rigorous contract monitoring process. Effective performance management results in action being taken quickly when poor performance is identified. Learning is taken from a range of sources and members and senior managers enthusiastically promote the participation of children and young people and ensure that their views are listened to and used to inform service improvement. Whilst thematic audits have improved practice, the quality assurance undertaken on the auditing of children’s case file records would be improved by an increased focus on outcomes.</p> <p>The Child Sexual Exploitation strategy and action plan is leading to positive service developments, but these are too recent to evaluate impact.</p> <p>The detailed workforce development strategy has included recent and ongoing investment in social care and early help services. The strategy is putting a clear emphasis on ensuring that practitioners have the right environment and support to effectively carry out their roles. This is having a positive impact on safe practice and ongoing professional development.</p>	

136. Elected members across the political spectrum, together with senior officers, share a vision of strong and continually improving services. Safeguarding children is a key priority for the authority and this is evidenced, for example, by the ongoing investment in early help and social care services and by the priority given to ensuring that tier 2 mental health services are available to children and young people. The authority makes best use of limited resources to ensure that vulnerable children are safeguarded.
137. Lines of accountability are clear in Lincolnshire, and relationships between the local authority and strategic partners are strong and characterised by mutual challenge. There is a well-established, experienced senior leadership team that is committed to providing consistently high quality services. Links between the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the LSCB Independent Chair are strong, with regular meetings taking place.
138. The joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) captures prevalence relating to mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse. The local authority is seeking to further improve the quality of the data captured, and is being proactive in consulting with service users to ascertain whether their needs could have been better met by existing support services.
139. Priorities are set out in the Children and Young People's Plan and these are aligned with priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the LSCB. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership acts as the commissioning arm of the Health and Wellbeing Board and joint commissioning arrangements are robustly managed through the Children's Services Commissioning Team. The strategic partnership has worked on some key areas of improvement, such as the Youth Housing Strategy, child poverty and the response to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The use of schools forum funding for early help has led to an important shared understanding that early help is not just the responsibility of local authority children's services.
140. The Health and Wellbeing Board is well established, with the right agencies represented at the right level. It has good links with the LSCB. A Public Protection Board brings together agencies that have responsibilities for safeguarding in Lincolnshire, including the Adults Safeguarding Board and MAPPA Safer Communities. The Lead Member for Children is a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the LSCB and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. This all contributes to a high degree of coherence between the different bodies involved in planning for children in Lincolnshire.

141. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee provides robust scrutiny of services for children and young people. Elected members on this committee have good insight and knowledge of their communities and the issues faced by children's services. In June 2014, a Scrutiny Committee task and finish group conducted a review of frontline social work and safeguarding services over a six-month period using a rigorous methodology. The action plan established from their recommendations is now monitored by the committee. Members visit children's homes and are involved with senior managers in quarterly safeguarding assurance visits to locality teams, when they talk to staff and sample case files. Senior managers are visible and undertake quarterly locality roadshows.
142. The local authority is an active and aspirational corporate parent. There are well-established links between the Corporate Parenting Panel and the scrutiny committee for children's services, with the chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel reporting to alternate committee meetings. The panel chair and members seek to actively hear the voices of children and young people through attendance at a variety of forums and events. The Corporate Parenting Panel identified the need to raise the profile of the role of corporate parenting with elected members, and the councillor development days held to address this are excellent practice; the scrutiny committee is monitoring attendance to ensure that all councillors attend.
143. The ambition of the Corporate Parenting Panel has not yet delivered improvements in all aspects of the lives of children looked after and care leavers, particularly with regard to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, pathway planning for care leavers and the education attainment of children looked after.
144. Although children looked after are provided with full information about how to complain, the local authority does not currently analyse complaints from children looked after as a separate issue within its annual report. This means it cannot be sure that it understands the themes and issues prompting complaints from this group of children.
145. The appointment of a CSE Co-ordinator has assisted the local authority to understand and analyse the prevalence and nature of CSE in the county, and this analysis has led to a robust action plan, which is monitored by the LCSB. This has resulted in some positive service developments, which are too recent to evaluate for impact.

146. The local authority works hard to promote a culture of learning and its self-assessment is informed by a range of good-quality performance data and analysis, serious case reviews (SCRs) and individual and thematic case file audit findings (both internal and multi-agency), as well as by feedback from service users. The learning from thematic audits is evident: for example, a recent report on an internal audit concerning domestic abuse led to a range of improvements which has contributed to a better functioning MARAC.
147. The children's case file auditing aspect of the local authority's quality assurance process does not have sufficient focus on outcomes. Seventeen of the 30 case audits tracked during this inspection were found to have over-optimistic findings and were too focused on the process of practice rather than on how the quality of practice is improving outcomes for children.
148. A stakeholders' engagement group supports the implementation of the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy. The Voices for Choices group of children looked after is particularly active and has been involved in the training of social workers, contract tendering processes, designing a 'coming into care' app as well as interactive apps for the FAB! (fantastic, amazing, brilliant) award event that celebrates the achievements of children looked after and care leavers. The Munro Champions group is an effective forum, giving a voice to practitioners and service users that is informing service improvement. The Young Inspectors Group and their programme of inspections of local services are making a tangible difference to services provided to all young people in Lincolnshire.
149. A comprehensive workforce development strategy is in place which is clearly aligned to achieving service priorities. It encompasses behaviour statements, a practitioner capability framework and the evidence-based approaches adopted by the local authority to improving outcomes. This is supported by a comprehensive package of training in the 'Signs of Safety' tools and solution focussed methodology for social work staff and those in other agencies who deliver the early help offer. This new approach is a strength, which is beginning to have a positive impact on how professionals work with families and listen to the voices of children. A recent successful bid to the Department for Education's 'Innovations Fund' will provide extra funding to evaluate the use of this innovative approach.
150. New social workers are well supported through the ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment) programme and all social workers are further developed through good access to training, membership of Research in Practice and corporate membership of the College of Social Work. There is commitment to regular quality supervision, though there is no evidence of reflective casework discussion in written records. Appraisals are undertaken annually and personal developments are put into place informed by two observations of practice undertaken by the practice supervisor during the preceding year.

151. Management oversight of casework is strong. Managers ensure that they know the cases for which they are responsible, and they help social workers to think creatively about how to effect change. Management information is used effectively to track timescales for key pieces of work, such as assessments and statutory visits. The local authority has evidenced its commitment to manageable social work caseloads by investing in new social work posts. Caseloads currently average between 15 and 19 in the FAST teams, 17 in the children with disability teams and 18 to 22 in the LAC teams.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

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

Summary of findings

The LSCB is good because:

Partnership Arrangements

- Strong and effective partnership working is delivering excellent early help to children and families.
- The Board has contributed to the creation of a solid partnership of governance and accountability where key partners are accountable to one another.
- The Public Protection Board enhances networking across service boundaries in both adult and children's services.
- Multi-agency audit findings are carefully considered, and subsequent action plans are routinely monitored.
- Thresholds are understood and applied well by partner agencies.
- The Board challenges partners and holds them to account to improve the multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding children.
- The multi-agency training plan is comprehensive, and responsive to emerging issues and evaluation.
- There is evidence of widespread multi-agency attendance on training courses and e-learning, including by staff working in the independent sector.

Learning from serious incidents

- There is a clear process and independent gatekeeping to manage significant incidents.
- Learning from serious case reviews (SCR's) impacts positively on service development and informs training.

Child Sexual Exploitation

- The CSE work stream now includes a clear overview of CSE. This is promoting an

effective response to referrals, which are carefully monitored.

What does the LSCB need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

There are no areas for priority and immediate action.

Areas for improvement

152. Ensure that evidence of impact on practice is collected and analysed systematically to help the LSCB to measure its effectiveness more accurately and consistently.
153. Ensure that an evaluation of the impact of recent CSE initiatives relating to prevention, protection, prosecution and disruption is undertaken and that the right support is being made available to victims.
154. Ensure that the views of children and young people play an increasing role in the work of the Board and in any service developments that it oversees.

Inspection judgement about the LSCB

155. Clear governance arrangements enable the LSCB to meet its statutory obligations. Board membership is of a sufficiently senior level and the breadth of membership of the Board and its sub-groups is good. Attendance is good, promoting a consistent approach to the work of the Board. All member agencies contribute to the budget of the LSCB. Regular meetings with the Chief Executive, the DCS and other senior managers ensure that the safeguarding of children is on everyone's agenda.
156. The Board agrees priorities at an Annual General Meeting, and approves the forthcoming year's work programme and budget. An Annual Report sets out the work of the Board in accordance with current requirements, and additional clarity is provided by the business plan. The Board and its sub-groups are effectively supported by a team of staff under the management of the LSCB Business Manager. There are clear lines of communication between the Chief Executive of the local authority, the DCS and the Independent Chair of the LSCB which ensure that the areas of accountability for which they have responsibility are effectively managed. There are well-established scrutiny arrangements which enable elected members to provide challenge to both the Children's and the Adults Safeguarding Boards.

157. The LSCB has been influential in developing the current governance structures. The establishment of the Public Protection Board is one of the ways in which this has been achieved. This is chaired by the Independent Chair of the LSCB and brings together Chairs and Business Managers of all Boards which have responsibilities for safeguarding in Lincolnshire, including the Adults Safeguarding Board, MAPPA, Community Safety, Prevent, The Health Safeguarding Steering Group and Domestic Abuse Steering Group. This demonstrates a collective commitment to work in partnership, and acknowledges that there is a range of shared issues for which the various groups are responsible.
158. The Independent Chair maintains a challenge log, seen by inspectors, which lists the challenge made to agencies and senior managers together with agreed actions. LSCB member agencies moderate each other's section 11 Audit work, submitted annually as part of the three-yearly cycle. This enables a greater level of detailed understanding of the work of partners, encourages challenge into the system, and helps to develop a more consistent approach to the section 11 process.
159. The Independent Chair plays an active and pivotal role in the safeguarding agenda. He maintains regular contact with frontline practice. For example, he and the LSCB Business Manager meet regularly with CP Conference Chairs, from whom he receives clear descriptions of issues relating to child protection practice. This allows him to ensure that front-line practice issues are incorporated into the work of the Board.
160. The LSCB has a Multi-Agency Audit Plan, and is working with the local authority's quality assurance team to ensure that children's safety is a routine feature of all future children's audit work. A recently appointed LSCB auditor will further ensure that an effective focus is maintained on audit responsibilities. A key element of the role of the newly appointed auditor linked to the LSCB will be to establish closer links between service users and the Board, to increase the influence of young people on its work. Inspectors have seen examples of training and awareness-raising projects being directly influenced by the views of young people.
161. The Chair of the Significant Incident Review Group (SIRG) is a senior manager from a voluntary sector organisation. The SIRG incorporates SCR responsibilities within a wider remit, including a focus on excellence, so that the Board can disseminate good practice. Recent enhancements to the Team Around the Child (TAC) have been made following the publication of a local report into the suicide of a young person.

162. The legal adviser to the Board offers moderation of author narrative reports (Individual Management Reviews) to assure quality and consistency, and routinely attends the Board's Strategic Management Group and the SIRG, offering support to the SCR process through to publication and beyond. Each key agency has nominated a Senior Liaison Officer, the conduit through which information regarding significant incidents is processed. This promotes a consistent gatekeeping process, which is challenged periodically by SIRG members if matters subsequently come to light which they believe ought to have been presented to SIRG for discussion.
163. Training officers linked to the LSCB are briefed in advance of SCR publication, so that they can develop plans to roll-out the learning, including staff briefings and e-learning. Examples of such training include a focus on pre-birth assessments, the provision of emergency cover, and sessions about the SCR process itself.
164. A comprehensive range of training is available to partners, and the Annual Training Plan is influenced by learning from SCR's, local and national, as well as other key issues discussed by the range of sub-groups which report to the Board. Examples of training delivered as a direct result of learning from SCR's include a focus on pre-birth assessments, the provision of emergency cover, and sessions about the SCR process itself. Training is well attended throughout the partnership, a reflection in part on the practice of fining those who do not attend. Training is widely accessible. For example, the independent sector can access training events for a small fee.
165. Training staff linked to the Board evaluate the impact of training which they provide; they have recently improved their evaluation process by seeking feedback from participants, some weeks after the training has been delivered, regarding the impact which the training they received has had on their work.
166. The LSCB is confident that thresholds are well understood and embedded within the partnership. The Chair and Business Manager report that the availability of guidance for practitioners, and the TAC arrangements are working effectively.
167. Policies, procedures and guidance are overseen by the Policy, Procedure, Education and Training sub-group of the LSCB which ensures that procedures are up to date, compliant with statutory guidance and effectively disseminated throughout the partnership. Through this sub-group, agencies are empowered to bring forward policy and procedural gaps which has led, for example, to the development of a protocol about working with injuries to non-mobile babies.

168. CSE is a strategic and operational priority. The increased national focus has added further impetus and this led to a self-assessment being undertaken against the findings of recently published reports concerning CSE. The appointment of a CSE Co-ordinator accountable to the Board led to a risk analysis being undertaken. The subsequent report discusses LSCB priorities and considers prevalence, prevention, support to victims, disruption activity and prosecution and refers to the resources already deployed. A CSE strategy and action plan has been developed by the relevant sub-group, ratified by the LSCB, and a multi-agency CSE service has now been established, which is co-ordinated with personnel responsible for missing children. This works with children and young people most at risk, provides a source of advice and guidance and supports awareness-raising activity. The LSCB protocol for missing children and young people is up to date and reflects statutory guidance. It makes links with CSE and other forms of vulnerability and with the procedure concerning children and young people missing from education.
169. In response to the large number of children looked after placed within Lincolnshire by other local authorities, the Board receives quarterly reports about the various screening and contact arrangements which are in place. These are designed to ensure that children placed in Lincolnshire are known to relevant organisations, and that they are safe. Following concerns being expressed by the Board Chair to the DCS about the safeguarding of residents within a private children's home, swift and protective action was taken by the local authority.
170. CSE work does not currently encompass the wider role played by other services in Lincolnshire, for example: licensing, taxis, hotels, and fast food outlets. The Board is aware of this and is developing its strategic approach to this.
171. The CSE risk assessment identified issues with the quality of data relating to children and young people at risk of experiencing CSE and the need to ensure that support services for the victims of CSE are effectively quantified or co-ordinated. Activity to address these issues is being progressed through the CSE action plan.
172. The Board provides ad hoc opportunities for children and young people to influence its work through the Learning by Listening initiative, for example, improving the availability of substance misuse information to young people and involving young people in training. The involvement of young people is not yet a consistent feature in LSCB-driven service improvements.
173. The LSCB largely identifies the need for service improvement through audit findings and learning from SCRs. A more systematic gathering of evidence of impact of service developments on practice would assist the LSCB to measure its effectiveness more accurately and consistently.

What the inspection judgements mean

The local authority

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

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

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

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

The LSCB

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

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

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

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

Information about this inspection

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

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

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

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

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

The inspection team consisted of Seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Associate Inspectors from Ofsted.

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