

TITLE OF REPORT: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

REPORT OF: Alison Elliott, Interim Strategic Director, Care, Wellbeing and Learning

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - a. inform Cabinet of the findings from Ofsted's Inspection of **services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers** and their Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in Gateshead published on the 11th March 2016;
 - b. seek Cabinet's approval to implement the actions necessary in relation to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted processes within Gateshead, in line with Ofsted's recommendations;
 - c. refer the Ofsted report and subsequent improvement plans to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Background

2. The inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers was carried out under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which came into force in November 2013, replacing the previous inspection regime of the inspection of Local Authority Arrangements for Child Protection which were targeted inspections and followed the 3 year cycle of Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspections (SLAC).
3. All English Local Authorities will be subject to a SIF during the period November 2013 to April 2017. The inspection in Gateshead took place between 27th October and 19th November 2015. The inspection was unannounced and the inspection team consisted of seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), two HMI shadow inspectors and an Ofsted Senior Data Analyst. Inspectors 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.
4. 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 children it is trying to help, protect and look after.

5. Inspectors scrutinised over 200 case files and undertook in depth cases analysis of 20 cases, alongside the audits of those cases undertaken by the Local Authority. Inspectors interviewed staff and managers involved in these cases, observed practice, spoke with children, their families and other professionals to assess the effectiveness of multi agency arrangements. Additionally, they analysed performance data, management information and strategy documents.

Inspection Findings

6. The inspection judgement was that **the overall effectiveness of Children's Services in Gateshead is good**. Inspectors will make a judgement of 'good' where the characteristics set out are widespread and common practice and are demonstrably leading to improved outcomes. The detailed grading in each judgement area within the Ofsted framework was:
 - Children in need of help and protection - Good
 - Children looked after and achieving permanence - Good
 - Adoption performance - Good
 - Experiences and progress of care leavers – Requires Improvement
 - Leadership and Governance – Good
7. Between November 2013 and 11th March 2016, 85 Inspection reports have been published. Of those, only 20 others have achieved an overall judgement of 'Good', 22 inspections resulted in a judgement of Inadequate and the remaining 43 achieved a judgement of Requires Improvement. To date no authority has achieved an overall judgement of outstanding.
8. The inspection report highlights a great many strengths in practice across the whole system, including highlighting very good practice in the following areas; intensive family support in relation to domestic abuse; performance management and quality assurance arrangements; fostering support; celebrating the achievements of children looked after and care leavers and promoting children's rights. Each of the above named areas received an Annex O* commendation from Ofsted inspectors during the inspection period. The report recognises the significant improvements that have taken place over the last 4 years and the methodical way in which those improvements have been sustained.

* **Annex O** Where inspectors observe best and/or innovative practice in a local authority they record the detail in Annex O, the best practice log.
9. The inspection also included a review of the LSCB to evaluate the effectiveness of the Board in carrying out its statutory functions. Inspectors considered the evidence that the LSCB;
 - Coordinates the work of statutory partners in safeguarding children and monitors the effectiveness of those local arrangements.
 - Delivers multi-agency training in the protection and care of children which is evaluated regularly for impact on management and practice.
 - Ensures local policies and procedures in respect of thresholds for intervention are understood and operate effectively.

- Uses serious case reviews, management reviews and reviews of child deaths as opportunities for learning and feedback that drive improvement.
 - Evaluates and monitors the quality and effectiveness of the local authority and statutory partners in protecting and caring for children, including the provision of improvement advice and
 - Challenges practice between partners and uses casework auditing to ensure improvements can be made in frontline practice and management oversight.
10. The Inspector for the LSCB scrutinised minutes of board meetings and subgroup meetings, strategies, policies and performance management information alongside interviewing the LSCB Chair, Business Manager, LSCB Partners and Subgroup Chairs. The information gathered was triangulated with the inspection team who, when talking to social workers in relation to practice, discussed the impact of the LSCB on practice through multi-agency training and the dissemination of learning from serious case reviews.

Proposal

11. It is proposed to take forward actions to respond to the areas for development highlighted by the inspection (outlined in Appendix 1), through the Learning and Children's performance framework overseen by the Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning, Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to:
- (i) note the contents of the Ofsted Inspection Report of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the review of the LSCB, 27th October – 19th November 2015 (Appendix 2);
 - (ii) approve the implementation of the actions necessary in relation to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted processes within Gateshead, in line with Ofsted's recommendations; and
 - (ii) Refer the report to the Families OSC, Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board for consideration.

For the following reason:

- (i) To ensure that the Ofsted findings are given appropriate scrutiny as part of the Council's performance management arrangements and ensure that any necessary action is taken around the areas for improvement.

CONTACT: Ann Day ext 3484

Policy Context

1. The proposals in this report are in line with the Council's statutory duties and with the outcomes for children and young people set out in the Council Plan, Children Gateshead, the Children and Young People's Plan, and Gateshead's Sustainable Community Strategy - Vision 2030.

Inspection process

2. Until October 2013, Ofsted assessed with other inspectorates how well local services worked together to improve outcomes for children and young people through annual unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment, coupled with three yearly Inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children services and targeted inspections of Local Authority Arrangements for Child Protection from 1st April 2012 to 1st November 2013. These were replaced by the Single Inspection programme of **services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers** which commenced in November 2013.
3. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the local authority as the lead agency; on its effectiveness in leading partnership working from Early Help to children who need to be looked after and their progress on to becoming care leavers. The inspection team consisted of seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), two HMI Shadow Inspectors and an Ofsted Senior Data Analyst. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004 and the inspection team was on site between 27th October and 19th November 2015.
4. All inspection judgements are made using the following four-point scale: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate.
5. Inspection and regulation by external and independent agencies assists with ensuring that children and young people are achieving the best possible outcomes and are being kept safe and free from harm. Inspection and regulation reports also give an independent account to local citizens on how well services are doing and how public money is being spent.
6. The framework for the inspection that took place in Gateshead in 2011, which looked at both safeguarding arrangements and looked after children arrangements was significantly different to the one Ofsted currently uses. Ofsted revised the criteria for inspection in April 2012, setting a significantly higher bar, more rigorous attention to individual casework, no notice and a specific focus on child protection arrangements. In February 2013 Gateshead was inspected on its Arrangements for Child Protection receiving a judgement of good. This latest inspection in 2015 follows on from that previous inspection, being as rigorous in its methodology but with a broader remit to include Early Help and services to Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The methodology remains centred on casework and scrutinises whether services lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.
7. During the inspection Inspectors looked at over 200 cases, spoke to 21 young people directly and 37 parents/carers.

Inspection outcomes

8. **Children in need of help and protection was judged to be good.** The inspectors noted that children who need help and protection are identified early and receive effective and timely interventions, delivering improved outcomes. They judged the experience and progress of children who need help and protection as good highlighting that:
- Multi-agency partnerships are strong with a robust focus on safeguarding.
 - Thresholds for access to social care are well understood and embedded.
 - A wide range of very good targeted and coordinated early help is delivered across a range of services, with elements of outstanding practice within intensive family support.
 - The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and team around the family (TAF) approaches are being used effectively to identify and respond to need and lead to effective family-focused interventions. CAF assessments include an assessment of risk and how it impacts on the child.
 - The Early Help quality assurance system is providing a good overview of early intervention; as a result children who require more targeted or specialist help are identified quickly.
 - Referrals to children's social care receive timely responses that are thoroughly considered, safely managed and lead to swift and decisive actions.
 - Robust information gathering by duty workers at the contact and referral stage leads to timely and informed decision making. Information sharing between partners is effective and appropriate.
 - Child protection enquiries are thorough and benefit from effective multi-agency strategy meetings.
 - Assessment quality is good; assessments are holistic, make good use of historical information and evaluate the child's experience well and contain balanced strengths and risks analysis leading to appropriate outcomes for children.
 - Evidence of direct work with children is a particular strength.
 - Social workers know the children they work with well and, as a result, provide good support to meet children's needs and promote their safety. Visits to children are regular and most benefit from having a consistent Social worker which enables trusting relationships to be built.
 - Multi-agency arrangements to safeguard vulnerable children who go missing from home, care or education or are at risk of sexual exploitation are robust.
 - The proactive approach taken with unborn children is identified as a strength ensuring protective action commences and continues before and after birth.

9. **The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence was judged to be good.** The inspectors noted that decisions to look after children are generally timely, appropriate and in the best interests of the children. The following areas of good practice were highlighted:
- The Public Law Outline (PLO) is applied appropriately and ensures that children are supported and protected well.
 - Effective intensive family support services wrap around families to keep children within their family where it is safe to do so.
 - Social workers carry out viability assessments and use family group conferences to explore alternative options to being taken into care, resulting in effective use of placements with family members and SGOs (Special Guardianship Orders)
 - Social workers are good at listening to children and know them well. Children's wishes and feelings are well recorded in assessments.
 - The quality of assessment is good; assessments are comprehensive with good analysis and evidence of research.
 - The needs of children are well considered with good attention to health matters, identity and diversity.
 - Decisions and planning for children to return home are robust, with clear evidence of senior management oversight and support plans in place to address risks.
 - Children are seen alone where appropriate and, importantly, the frequency of visits is increased where needed.
 - Children are very well supported to express their views; social workers take good account of children's wishes and feelings when considering where they should live. Looked after Children are well represented through One Voice, which is highly influential in shaping services for looked after children.
 - Placement stability in Gateshead is very good.
 - The projected needs of children looked after is very well understood. This informs recruitment activity and planning to maintain sufficient resources. The recruitment of foster carers is good.
 - Children looked after in Gateshead who are missing and at risk of sexual exploitation receive a well-coordinated response to the risks.
 - Clear protocols, procedures and good access to early intervention and treatment services for substance misuse ensure that children in Gateshead receive appropriate support.
 - Educational attainment for looked after children is improving and is above national comparators across all the key stages.

10. **Sub judgement: Adoption performance is good**

- Children are identified at an early stage and their parallel plans are effectively tracked to minimise delays.
- There is a coherent recruitment strategy for adopters based on an analysis of the likely predicted numbers, needs and profiles of children.
- The majority of assessments of adopters are timely, robust and child centred, with clear analysis supporting the recommendations. The adoption panel is suitably robust and carefully considers recommendations for approvals and the quality of matching children with adopters.
- There are minimal disruptions, with one breakdown in 2014–15. This demonstrates the quality of matches for children and the post-adoption support available.
- Fostering to adopt is a relatively new initiative that is successfully achieving permanence through Adoption for Children.
- Arrangements to support children and adopters pre and post adoption are effective and responsive. Timely assessments are completed to identify individual needs and tailor support packages.
- Adoption support is commissioned through an adoption agency. This is particularly highly regarded by adopters. Individual therapy and psychological support has been effective in helping families to improve relationships and attachments between child and adopter.

11. **Sub judgement: The experience and progress of care leavers requires improvement.** Inspectors highlighted the following areas of good practice:

- Arrangements for keeping in touch with care leavers are effective.
- Assessment of risk is key to the work undertaken by social workers, personal advisers and other support staff working with care leavers.
- Care leavers are effectively supported and challenged to identify risk and reduce their involvement in risky behaviour.
- Support is carefully calibrated to meet the specific needs of care leavers over time and to deal with the scale of the issues they may confront.
- Care leavers have also been involved in developing a care leavers' charter.
- The young people value the relationships they have with their personal advisers and the support they receive. As one young person put it, 'I see them as family; they are always there for me'.

- Seven care leavers are being well supported to attend local universities, including help with fees and maintenance costs and additional payments to foster carers providing 'staying put' arrangements.
- For the very small number of care leavers who have disabilities, thorough and well-managed transition arrangements ensure they continue to be effectively supported by adult services.
- The Council are compliant with the Southwark Judgement, ensuring that all 16- to 17-year-olds who become homeless are assessed as a child in need and, where appropriate, become looked after.
- All young people and care leavers now live in safe and secure accommodation. Care leavers have good access to a range of suitable accommodation, including increasing numbers who are benefitting from the staying put policy now in place.
- A successful and innovative commissioned service, which uses sport to engage with young people was developed in response to an identified need for supported accommodation for young people in Gateshead.
- Joint working arrangements with housing staff and a proactive and strategic approach ensures that young people at risk of losing their tenancies or becoming homeless are quickly identified and supported, increasing the numbers of care leavers successfully taking up and sustaining their own tenancies.

12. **Leadership, management and Governance is good.** The inspectors found that children and young people were at the heart of good practice in Gateshead. They highlighted the following areas:

- Political leaders and members led by the CEO are good advocates for vulnerable children and young people.
- There is a strong ethos of collective responsibility across the council, which is helping to achieve the best outcomes for children
- The level of challenge by elected members is robust; areas of strength and improvement are well understood and this leads to effective and timely challenge of key issues.
- Governance arrangements are robust and there is a golden thread running through all of the strategic plans for children, young people and families, both within children's social care and across the partnership.
- There is an outstanding performance management and outcomes framework that is contributing to a shared ambition for and prioritisation of services for children and families.
- A coherent and comprehensive quality assurance framework is embedded and supports a rigorous programme of management oversight and continuous improvement within the local authority.

- Routine auditing is strong with good attention to the consistency of the work and effective consideration of both qualitative and quantitative standards.
- A quality assurance system is also embedded in relation to early help. This is providing a good overview of the effectiveness of early intervention
- There are effective arrangements with Gateshead Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).
- There are clear pathways established for accessing a comprehensive range of services to support children and families in need of early help, targeted and specialist support.
- Services are robustly monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness. There is effective monitoring of contract compliance by the Children's Commissioning Team; this is ensuring good quality and choice of accommodation for children looked after and care leavers.
- The joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) is comprehensive and informs service needs well and supports the alignment of adult and children's commissioning.
- The workforce strategy appropriately includes clear expectations for learning and continuous professional development to improve and inform workers' practice. There is a responsive, accessible and appropriately targeted offer of training for social workers and managers, including good learning from serious case reviews regionally and nationally.
- The Principal Social Worker role is well established and has a positive impact on improving quality and the recruitment and retention of social workers through implementing an attractive workforce offer and clear career pathways.
- Historically, Gateshead has had a stable workforce and the increase in the recent turnover of staff is well understood, with responsive action being taken to ensure competitive remuneration packages and securing the stability of the workforce in the longer term. Existing staff are supported in maintaining appropriate caseloads.
- Supervision is of a consistently good quality and management oversight of cases is routine and comprehensive in most cases seen. There is a consistent focus on continual professional development through supervision, observations of practice and through appraisal.
- The children's rights service provides effective services for and coordination of complaints, advocacy and the provision of independent visitors for children, young people and their families.
- There are many excellent examples of operational staff going the extra mile to ensure that children and young people are helped to understand interventions and contribute to planning.

- There are cohesive working relationships between the corporate complaints team and children's rights service, which help children express their views well both formally and informally when they are not happy about a service.
 - High numbers of children make a positive contribution across all areas of service delivery and this was consistently seen through direct work.
13. **Recommendations from Ofsted.** However, despite the good practice highlighted above there were elements that Inspectors determined should be improved and they provided a number of recommendations as detailed below:
- Improve the quality of all children's plans, including pathway plans to ensure that targets for improvement are clear and that they focus on risk and the most important issues for children, young people and care leavers.
 - Ensure that child protection conferences and looked after reviews are used to drive and progress plans through the use of effective challenge and robust risk analysis.
 - Improve the attendance of education professionals at all children and young people's reviews and meetings, to ensure a robust focus on their educational outcomes.
 - Ensure that children who are subject to child protection processes have access to independent advocacy, in order to help share their views and to inform decisions about their lives.
 - Support care leavers to understand their health histories more thoroughly and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services.
 - Devise a more effective way of communicating legal entitlements to all care leavers.
 - Establish a protocol with all education and training partners to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide proactive support for care leavers to stay on their courses and complete their qualifications.
 - Ensure the adoption panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel and adoption performance.
14. A number of the recommendations have already been addressed and a robust action plan has been developed in order to monitor progress and ensure the continual drive to outstanding across all service areas.
15. **The review of the LSCB found that the LSCB requires improvement.** The inspectors found that while it fulfils its statutory responsibilities and there is clear, strong commitment from key statutory agencies, there are gaps in its membership, activities and monitoring of frontline practice that limit its effectiveness. However, much of the work it undertakes it does well and some, very well. They highlighted the following areas of good practice

- The LSCB has a comprehensive and robust business plan covering a three-year period. Yearly action plans build on progress from the previous year.
- Plans are well aligned to other strategic plans and are well informed by identified local needs, shared priorities and findings from local LSCB auditing activity as well as national learning.
- The LSCB exerts its challenge function appropriately, with some examples of strong challenge to partners resulting in improved engagement with safeguarding.
- The LSCB identified most of the areas for development seen in this inspection in March 2015 and is taking action to address them.
- Good collaborative working between sub-groups has resulted in an effective whole systems approach to safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation and extremism.
- The board's auditing activity is used to improve practice. For example, the Neglect Inquiry has led to the development of comprehensive guidance for all agencies.
- Communication across the LSCB sub groups and to the full Board is generally effective, leading to well-coordinated activities based on an established cycle of scrutiny, learning training and action.

16. The review made the following **recommendations** for improvement;

- Ensure that the LSCB engages more effectively with the community it serves, including learning from the participation and testimony of children and young people, increased engagement with faith and ethnic minority groups, and timely recruitment of lay members.
- Develop appropriate pathways to increase the LSCB contribution to and influence on the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure the experience of children and young people are given appropriate consideration in all activity.
- Ensure that training is sufficient to meet demand and is informed by a training needs analysis that includes analysis of impact on practice over time and the difference it has made to outcomes for children.
- Ensure that agencies report the outcomes of single-agency auditing activity to the LSCB to increase its oversight of practice
- Review the multi-agency data set used by the board to ensure that it meets LSCB priorities and includes all relevant activity that impacts on frontline practice, including workforce information
- Develop robust mechanisms for measuring the LSCB's effectiveness as part of a performance management framework

- Ensure that the LSCB annual report provides a clear account of the activity of the LSCB and its strengths and areas for improvement that is easily understood by a lay reader.

Consultation

17. The Cabinet Members for Children and Young People have been consulted. The inspection report has been widely circulated to partners for comment and will be discussed at the Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to ensure that any improvements or learning is taken forward appropriately.

Alternative Options

18. There are no alternative options.

Implications of Recommended Option

19. Resources

- a) Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources has confirmed there are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- b) Human Resources Implications** - Any human resources implications arising from the improvement areas will be addressed in line with the Council's established practices.
- c) Property Implications** – nil.

20. **Risk Management Implication** – Through Gateshead's cycle of continuous improvement the areas for improvement highlighted in the inspection report will be addressed, ensuring that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are met according to statutory requirements and that the risks to their safety are minimised and their protection is improved.

21. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - The proposals are designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and their families. Specific activity in relation to equality and diversity implications is highlighted as an area for improvement; in undertaking this activity services for children and families will better reflect equality and diversity implications.

22. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – nil.

23. **Sustainability Implications** – nil.

24. **Human Rights Implications** – as a result of the proposed improvements we will seek to enhance the human rights of all children, young people and their families who are affected.

25. **Health Implications** – There are no specific health implications

26. **Area and Ward Implications** – Ofsted's Inspection is provided on a borough wide basis and areas for improvement will be addressed across the borough.

27. **Background Information** - The following documents have been relied on in preparation of this report:

- Ofsted's Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and carer leavers and Reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards originally published in November 2013 and subsequent iterations, latest version October 2015.
- Ofsted's Inspection Report of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in Gateshead published 11th March 2016.