

**14 April 2016**

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **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 Board**

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

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to:
  - inform Families OSC of the findings from Ofsted's Inspection **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 Board** in Gateshead published on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016;
  - refer the Ofsted improvement plans for consideration to the Committee
  - and provide a precis of other recent Ofsted Inspection Reports relating to Local Authorities within the region under this inspection framework. **(appendix 1)**

### **Background**

2. The inspection was conducted under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The framework for Inspection services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) came into force in November 2013. They focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, and children who return home. The framework also focuses on the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and the experiences and progress of care leavers. The leadership, management and governance judgement addresses the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people and the quality of professional practice locally.
3. All local authorities will be inspected under this framework within a three-year period. The inspection is undertaken over a four week period at short notice, the Local Authority being informed the day before the inspection team arrives on site. Prior to arrival the inspectors have already received an analysts' précis of the local authority with the analyst joining the inspection team on site at various points during the 4-week period.

4. Between November 2013 and 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **The Gateshead Inspection**

5. The inspection took place between 27<sup>th</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The inspection was undertaken by seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) 2 additional shadow inspectors and an Ofsted Senior Data Analyst. The inspection team evaluated children's cases through audit analysis and through speaking directly to frontline practitioners, managers and other professionals involved in the cases. Inspectors shadowed staff observing the practice of duty social workers, the work of social workers with children and families and the work of the independent reviewing officers. The inspectors approach tested the decision making at all stages of the child's journey from early help, referral and assessment to permanence planning, placement decisions and leaving care.
6. Inspectors scrutinised over 200 cases and undertook in depth cases analysis of over 20 cases including interviews with staff and managers involved. Inspectors also observed practice, spoke with children, their families, social workers, managers and other professionals to assess the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements. They analysed performance data, management information and strategy documents.

### **Inspection Findings**

7. The Inspection judgement overall was that **Children's Services in Gateshead are Good**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;
  - **Children who need help and protection – Good**
  - **Children looked after and achieving permanence – Good**
    - Adoption performance – Good
    - Experience and progress of care leavers – Requires Improvement
  - **Leadership management and Governance - Good**
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
  - how it 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.
11. It is proposed to take forward actions to respond to the areas for development highlighted by the inspection and outlined below through the Learning and Children's performance framework overseen by the Strategic Director, CWL, Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board.
12. **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:
- Multiagency partnership 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.

13. **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.

13. **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.

14. **Sub judgement: The experience and progress of care leavers requires improvement.** Inspectors highlighted the following 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.

15 **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.

16. **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.

17. **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.

18. 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.
19. 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.
20. Recommendation for the Overview and Scrutiny committee;
- to note the contents of this report and to
  - scrutinise and monitor the subsequent improvement plan relating to the Ofsted findings

## Appendix 1

### Cumbria Local Authority – inspected 3<sup>rd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015

19. Overall judgement is that **Children’s Services in Cumbria are inadequate**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;

- **Children who need help and protection – requires improvement**
- **Children looked after and achieving permanence – inadequate**
  - Adoption performance – Requires Improvement
  - Experience and progress of care leavers – Requires Improvement
- **Leadership management and Governance - Inadequate**

The Ofsted inspection found that following the inspection of help and protection in May 2013 in which Cumbria were found to be inadequate, Children’s Services has made significant progress, from a low base, in tackling critical issues around the help and protection of children, culture change, social work capacity and working to effectively engage the wider partnership that helps and protects children. However, services for looked after children had not had the same level of prioritisation and focus and as a result were inadequate. The authority were given 23 areas to prioritise for immediate action for improvement

20. The main issues for Cumbria related to the following

- Many looked after children have experienced unacceptable drift in decision-making and delay in the progress of their plans.
- Management oversight across all areas of work is weak. This leaves poor practice unchallenged, and too many children’s needs are unmet and plans not progressed within the child’s timescale.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service is not effectively championing the needs of looked after children; nor is their practice consistently robust when considering the risks to children subject to child protection plans.
- There are insufficient resources to meet the emotional well-being needs of LAC
- Strategic planning to respond to both child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse is underdeveloped.

#### Quality of practice

- Social work practice is too variable, and too often children’s plans, including those for looked after children, are not reviewed and progressed in a timely manner.
- Assessments to inform decision-making and plans for looked after children are not always completed in a timescale that meets the child’s needs.
- Some child protection assessments are too long, and do not focus sufficiently on risk in a way that enables families and professionals to understand exactly what the concern is.
- When safeguarding concerns have reduced, in some cases step-down arrangements are not robust and are closed prematurely by children’s social care.
- Not all homeless 16 and 17 year olds in Cumbria are provided with a service that effectively meets their needs.

- Care leavers do not receive the minimum £2,000 setting up home grant as recommended in statutory guidance.

## **Darlington Local Authority inspected 23 June – 16 July 2015**

21. Overall judgement is that **Children's Services in Darlington are inadequate**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;

- **Children who need help and protection – inadequate**
- **Children looked after and achieving permanence – Requires Improvement**
  - Adoption performance – Good
  - Experience and progress of care leavers – Good
- **Leadership management and Governance - Inadequate**

22. The inspection found that The local authority has not made sufficient progress in all areas identified by the last inspection in 2012. The standard of some social work services for children needing help and protection and the quality of leadership, management and governance have declined. Managers at all levels of the organisation do not have sufficient grip or oversight of front-line practice for children who need help and protection. As a result a significant number wait too long for their needs to be assessed. This inspection identified a high number of assessments (94) that were not completed within timescales agreed by managers, with too many children left in situations of unassessed risk.

23. Leadership, management and governance are inadequate because of serious failures by senior leaders to take effective oversight of, and accountability for, Darlington's services to children. Elected members and the council's Chief Executive have not been sufficiently challenging towards children's services managers to assure themselves that children are safe. A reliance on inaccurate performance reports and upward self-reporting by senior managers means they were unaware, until this inspection, of the extent or impact of the service's underperformance.

**24. This led to the following recommendations for improvement being made by Ofsted**

- Ensure robust management oversight of the single assessment process at both first tier and senior management level, so that children and families are seen and risks evaluated within timescales that meet the child's need.
- Drive improvement through the quality assurance of assessments that ensures that all areas of risk to children are addressed, historical information is considered and analysis is robust, so that children's needs, including the need for protection, are fully addressed.
- Improve the quality and timeliness of social work reports prepared for child protection conferences, ensure that initial child protection conferences are held within timescales that accord with statutory guidance, and ensure core groups are recorded effectively.

- Review the current configuration of social work teams to ensure equity in workload distribution and that the working environment is conducive to good social work practice across the whole of the service.
- Review processes and resources available for performance monitoring at all levels of the organisation and ensure that robust arrangements are put in place as a matter of urgency.
- Ensure that elected members are rigorous in their understanding of children's services performance and are enabled to robustly challenge senior managers to improve.
- Complete a thorough review of all children subject to section 20 accommodation to ensure that its use is legitimate and appropriate in all cases.
- Ensure that independent reviewing officers (IRO) demonstrate rigour when overseeing both the quality and progress of plans, and the frequency of social work visits to children who are the subject of child protection plans.
- When IROs challenge poor practice, make sure this is clearly recorded and monitored to ensure improvements are made and, where necessary, a lack of progress can be formally escalated to senior leaders.
- Ensure when children are looked after that decisions about their need for permanence are timely with robust oversight, including by IROs
- Ensure that return interviews are offered for all children who go missing and that the take-up of these interviews is monitored and information is used to inform plans to keep children safe
- Make sure that early help is effectively targeted, coordinated and evaluated so that families receive appropriate support when need is first identified, and the quality of early help assessments is improved by robust quality assurance arrangements
- Extend the range of housing provision available to homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and for care leavers so that no young person is placed in bed and breakfast accommodation
- Ensure that all children looked after can access an independent visitor when necessary, and that the impact of advocacy is subject to evaluation and review.
- Ensure that all children looked after have timely initial health assessments.
- Improve the monitoring of educational progress of children looked after so that action is taken to narrow the gap in attainment compared with all children in Darlington.

- Improve the consistency and quality of personal education plans and ensure that the pupil premium is effectively utilised to improve the educational attainment and achievement of looked after children.
- Ensure that reports are completed on fostering and adoption services every six months so that elected members, senior leaders and other stakeholders receive information about performance, standards, achievements and service developments in line with national minimum standards.

### **Sunderland Local Authority inspected 11<sup>th</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2015**

25. Overall judgement is that **Children's Services in Sunderland are inadequate**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;

- **Children who need help and protection – inadequate**
- **Children looked after and achieving permanence – Inadequate**
  - Adoption performance – Inadequate
  - Experience and progress of care leavers – Inadequate
- **Leadership management and Governance – Inadequate**

26. The Ofsted Inspectors found that there are widespread and serious failures in the services provided to children and their families in Sunderland and that this was as a result of corporate failure by senior leaders and managers which led to children and young people being left unsafe. During the inspection, 21 children's cases were referred back to the local authority by inspectors to request that action be taken to ensure children were safe. This is one out of every ten children's cases looked at by inspectors. They found that services had significantly deteriorated since the last inspection of children's services in April 2012. Poor practice has already been identified by two independent reviews of children's services commissioned by the local authority in 2014. Despite this, inspectors identified widespread, systemic poor practice and services that are neither adequately ensuring the safety nor promoting the welfare of children and young people. They found fundamental shortfalls in frontline practice across the breadth of children's services.

27. The local authority and partner agencies do not have a shared, up to date strategic plan that sets out their current priorities for children, how they will be delivered and how their impact will be measured. Performance management and quality assurance processes are poor, based on unreliable data and do not always focus on services and areas of practice in the greatest need of improvement. Learning from audits, the complaints process and feedback from children, young people and their families is not used to drive improvement planning. In addition, scrutiny by elected members lacks rigour and has had little positive impact.

28. This led to the following **recommendations for improvement from Ofsted commenting that the recommendations are the priorities for Sunderland but do not address** all of the detailed failings identified in this inspection and contained in the main body of the report:

- Take urgent action to review the cases of all children and young people who do not have an allocated social worker or who are not being actively worked with, and provide immediate and appropriate assessment and help as necessary.
- Review as a matter of urgency all cases where children are looked after under voluntary arrangements to establish whether this legal basis is sufficient to ensure their safety and emotional security; and take additional action where it is not.
- Increase the capacity, quality and focus of the MASH to meet the demand for service.
- Review the cases of all children being worked with under the public law outline or in care proceedings to ensure that robust plans are in place and that cases are progressing at a pace that matches children's needs.
- Ensure robust management oversight of frontline practice so that decision making, assessment and planning for children are timely, clear and meets their needs.
- Ensure children are seen promptly and regularly and that their views inform assessments and plans in line with their developing needs.
- Take urgent action to recruit qualified and experienced staff and retain and support professional skills and competence.
- Ensure manageable caseloads for social workers so that they can respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the needs of children and young people.
- Work with partners to ensure that there is a single, clear, up-to-date multi-agency strategic plan to shape services for children and young people in Sunderland and against which progress can be measured.
- Ensure that strategic planning is focused on the areas of practice most in need of improvement and is underpinned by clear arrangements
- Develop performance management and quality assurance processes that focus on key priorities to help drive improved performance.
- Strengthen the function of scrutiny committee so that it has a clearer impact on improving outcomes for children.
- Ensure that the local authority meets its role and responsibilities as a corporate parent.



- Ensure there is sufficient breadth and quality of placements to meet the needs of children looked after and care leavers.
- Provide an out of hours service that meets the emergency needs of children and young people and is effectively coordinated with day-time services to ensure consistent and safe work with children and their families.
- Establish clear practice standards, policies and procedures so expectations are clearly understood by social workers, early help practitioners and their managers.
- Strengthen the arrangements for disabled children's transition assessments to adult services.
- Engage with partner agencies to agree the aims, structure and implementation of the integrated early help offer and its fit with wider services for children and young people.
- Build on the recent review of services for children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation to ensure that these services, and those for children missing from home, care or education, are comprehensive, joined up and have sufficient capacity.
- Revise the arrangements for supervised contact to ensure these are driven by children's needs and that workers are sufficiently experienced and trained to oversee contact appropriately.
- Strengthen the Virtual School so that it is able to track effectively the progress of all children looked after and care leavers.
- Improve the quality, consistency and monitoring of all personal education plans (PEPs,) particularly target setting and action planning, so that these become a more useful tool to help young people make educational progress.
- Establish an effective recruitment strategy for adopters.
- Reduce the likelihood of adoption breakdown by developing the adoption support offer so that children and adopters receive support that matches their needs
- Improve ways to keep in touch with care leavers, providing a place for them to drop in and have access to the care leavers' team.
- Improve pathway plans so that they reflect the needs and aspirations of young people and involve them in the planning process.
- Improve arrangements to provide and monitor education, employment and training opportunities for care leavers and increase options available to them, for example through apprenticeships

## Middlesbrough Local Authority inspected 24<sup>th</sup> Nov – 17th Dec 2015

29. Overall judgement is that **Children's Services in Middlesbrough Require Improvement**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;
- **Children who need help and protection – Requires Improvement**
  - **Children looked after and achieving permanence – Requires Improvement**
    - Adoption performance – Good
    - Experience and progress of care leavers – Good
  - **Leadership management and Governance – Requires Improvement**
30. Ofsted Inspectors found that Children and young people in Middlesbrough are kept safe by the work of the local authority. When children are at immediate risk of significant harm, social workers respond quickly and effectively. However, due to insufficient management oversight of work in frontline teams and the failure of some professionals in other agencies to fully engage with the early help offer, some children and young people have experienced delays in receiving services.
31. Despite the authority's need to identify savings, significant additional funding has been identified to further develop the early help offer. Assessments are generally good but because they are not always supported by chronologies of children's history or reviewed in timescales that match children's circumstances, the individual needs of some children are not identified as quickly as they could be. The local authority has been successful at retaining and recruiting staff. The workforce is relatively stable and social workers have manageable caseloads. This means that children and young people in Middlesbrough are likely to be able to build a good relationship with their social worker and not experience multiple changes of worker.
32. Performance management does not sufficiently help to improve practice. Some data is not accurate and management reports lack the analysis that could identify both poor practice and possible solutions. A lack of audits in the last few months limits the local authority's understanding of the quality of frontline practice. Although children and young people's views are well considered on an individual basis, and there are some good examples of the Children in Care Council influencing practice. Strategic partnership working is under-developed. Corporate parenting is a strength in Middlesbrough, with a clear commitment from the council to children and young people. There is very good support for children's emotional well-being and improvement in the performance of the youth offending service has led to a significant reduction in the number of children looked after entering the criminal justice system.
33. **This led to the following recommendations for improvement being made by Ofsted**
- Ensure that all children and young people receive the right services without delay and that their progress is tracked by strengthening management oversight, supervision and recording.

- Ensure that managers review the progress of assessments within timescales that match individual children and young people's circumstances and needs.
- Improve performance management and quality assurance systems, including data quality, to effectively monitor and improve the quality of services.
- Work with partner agencies to build a stronger strategic vision of the shared priorities for children's safeguarding and social care needs, particularly for early help services.
- Engage with partner agencies to increase the number and quality of early help assessments completed and to ensure that a full range of agencies are taking on the role of lead professional.
- Ensure that the independent reviewing officer service is adequately staffed to provide a consistently effective service to children and young people, including the timely circulation of minutes from review meetings.
- Support improved outcomes for children looked after by ensuring that care plans contain sufficient detail, clear actions and timescales.
- Improve the systems for progressing cases in a timely way following adoption process meetings, so that they are effective in all cases and that the reasons for matching decisions are clearly recorded.
- Develop systems to improve the participation of children and young people, including in child protection case conferences and how their views are collated and used to improve services.
- Strengthen the provision and use of return home interviews to ensure that individual children and young people are safeguarded and that patterns of risk are better understood and addressed, particularly where they relate to child sexual exploitation.
- Further develop work with Middlesbrough's diverse communities, particularly asylum seekers, to better understand and meet the needs of these children and young people.
- Make sure that children looked after receive statutory visits within expected timescales to more effectively monitor progress.
- Help social workers understand the historical context and risk factors for the children and families they are working with by making better use of chronologies.
- Improve the attainment levels of all children looked after, but particularly those of secondary school age, by improving attendance and better supporting the transition between primary and secondary school.

- Sharpen the focus of personal education plans on addressing the specific actions that children looked after and their teachers need to take to improve progress, as well as on setting out in detail how the school will use the pupil premium to improve behaviour, attendance and attainment.
  - Further increase the numbers of care leavers securing sustainable education, training and employment by maintaining and improving existing good partnership work with education and training providers.
34. Northumberland and Durham have both been inspected during 2016 and the reports are awaited.