

TITLE OF REPORT: Looked After Children Improvement Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the committee with an overview of the work being undertaken to improve services for looked after children following the Ofsted inspection and in response to ongoing performance reporting.

Background

1. The single inspection for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers was undertaken between 27th October and 19th November 2015 and was conducted under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The framework for this Inspection came into force in November 2013 and focuses 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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

5. 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**

6. **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. There were a number of areas of good practice highlighted in the inspection report which are attached at Appendix 1:

7. Recommendations

The recommendations specific to looked after children and care leavers are outlined 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.
- 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.

8. As a result of those recommendations an improvement plan has been developed to address the issues raised and ensure continual improvement in services for our looked after children, young people and care leavers. The outline plan is attached at **Appendix 2**.
9. One of the significant areas of activity for our looked after children relates to their educational outcomes and subsequent Education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers. Both areas have also been highlighted through our own performance reporting.
10. The percentage of pupils who are looked after children achieving 5 or more GCSEs A*-C or equivalent including Maths and English has been disappointing in recent years. For the academic year 2013/14 only 8.57% achieved %A*-Cs incl English and Maths, for the academic year 2014/15 this increased to 20%. There were 45 looked after children in the cohort for 2014/15 (including 16 children out of borough). Although this meant the target of 21% was narrowly missed Gateshead compared well against the national and regional averages, where 13.8% of children nationally achieved these results and 11% of children in the north east.
11. 20 children in the Gateshead cohort (44.5%) out of 45 children had statements of SEN/or an Education and Health Care Plan (EHC).
12. The appointment of a teacher and educational psychologist to the REALAC Team has made a difference over the year. Personalised programmes are offered to pupils at risk of underachieving and liaison with schools on pupils' individual learning needs has improved. The Headteacher of the Virtual School for Looked after Children has produced a "data dashboard" which specifically details the performance of looked after children. This dashboard is produced on an annual basis and will help to highlight performance trends over time and keep track of the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils.
13. A Behaviour Support officer has recently been appointed to work with looked after children who are excluded or at risk of exclusion.
14. Additionally the Virtual school head will be monitoring the quality of provision being provided to children in alternative education provision including the number of hours they receive and the quality of teaching provided.

The Predicted Results 2015/16

The following predictions are based on the last set of Data received from schools at Easter 2016.

15. Key Stage 2 Predictions 2015/16

At this time there were 19 Looked after Children in Year 6, these children attended both schools in Gateshead and Out of Borough.

All LAC Including Out of Borough Schools				
Number Achieving Expected Level	13	13	13	13
Number in Cohort	19	19	19	19
% Achieving Expected Level				
Writing	68			
Reading		68		
Maths			68	
Writing, Reading and Maths				68

The table above shows that 13 of the children are predicted to reach the expected levels in Writing, Reading and Maths which comes out at 68%.

This % is less than last years for Writing & Reading which was 78% but higher in Maths and for Writing/Reading & Maths which was 67%

The cohort of 19 for 2015/16 is much higher than last year when it was only 9.

16. GCSE/Equivalent Predictions 2015/16

At this time there were 33 Looked after Children in Year 11, these children attended both schools in Gateshead and Out of Borough.

33 Looked after Children	No of Children	Percentage
5 A*-C	9	27
5A*-C inc M&E	4	12
SEN	19	58

The table shows that we are predicting the following:

9 children will achieve 5 A*-C which is a total of 27% which is the same as 2014/15

4 Children will achieve 5 A*-C including English & Maths which is a total of 12% which is less than 2014/15 when it was 20%

A total of 19 are SEN children which is 58% of the cohort compared to 2014/15 when it was only 44%

The numbers in both cohorts will be different when the actual results are received as Looked after Children numbers change on a daily basis. These are all small numbers for percentages.

Anecdotally the LA is aware that a number of our looked after children struggled within the exam setting finding the pressure and restrictive environment difficult to cope with.

17. Post 16 provision

A steering group led by the looked after children's service is working with partners in Gateshead and Newcastle college and Connexions to ensure support for looked after children and care leavers post 16.

The group are looking at;

- Improving the apprenticeship offer
- Improving traineeship offer
- Improving internship offer
- Working cohesively with colleges to ensure they know who our Looked after Children are and to ensure they receive the correct support
- Improving the offer and choices for care leavers

The steering group will meet on a bi monthly basis to identify the children needing the most support, identify who will offer this support and monitor progress

18. Recommendation

Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- (i) Give its views on the development of a Looked After Children Improvement Plan.
- (ii) Agree to receive a progress update in March 2017.

Appendix 1

Extracts from the Ofsted inspection report highlighting good practice within the judgement area of Children looked after and achieving permanence, including adoption and the experience and progress of care leavers:

- 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.

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.

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.

Appendix 2

	Key tasks	Measure/milestones of success	Leads	Actions Taken	timescale	RAG
1.1	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					
	New CP, CiN and LAC plans formatted based on audit and inspection findings	Plans in live on Carefirst	Steve Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed templates for the plans have been disseminated with SGCP team managers Plans are with the care first team for formatting 	30 April 2016	Green
	New planning template to be developed for pathway plans	Plans in live on Carefirst	Elaine Devaney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans in development with Looked After Children's Service Review of current planning documentation. 	31 Aug 2016	Yellow
	Targeted training for SWs team managers and IROs to be developed and rolled out	<p>Deliver training workshops to ensure staff including IROs and CP Chairs are equipped to write comprehensive and outcome focused plans with clear timescales and contingencies</p> <p>SWs managers and IROs are confident in use of new planning templates.</p>	Steve Day /IRO service/workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training programme in development Series of workshops to be scheduled to deliver training 	30 June 2016 – 31 st Dec 2016	Yellow
	Ensure actions arising from MSET translate into individual children's plans	<p>Practitioner guidance provided at MSET</p> <p>Planning template allows for revision</p> <p>Core groups and care teams understand the role of MSET and can adapt plans in light of new information</p>	Louise Gill/MSET Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioner Guidance in development How MSET information impacts on planning to be included in core group training 		Yellow

	Key tasks	Measure/milestones of success	Leads	Actions Taken	timescale	RAG
1.2	Ensuring Improved quality of all planning across CP/CiN/LAC and pathway planning					
	Specific audit documentation to be developed to focus on plans taking account of new planning template Targeted auditing to be undertaken 3 months and 6 months after roll out of the training and new template	Audit to confirm 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 plans have improved	Ann Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning standard item for performance clinic 	Audit tool July 31st Audit activity 3 & 6 months November 2016	
	Managers to ensure plans are completed to the appropriate standard – evidencing robust Management oversight of care planning	Audit assesses plans have improved and management oversight is robust Service managers and team managers' report improvement through performance clinic	All team managers/ service managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight strengthened in relation to plans 	ongoing	
	CP Chairs and IROs to ensure children, young people and parents/carers know what is expected of them and what would happen if things don't improve	Feedback from children young people and parents shows improvement in their understanding of plan requirements and consequences	IRO team manager		ongoing	
2.0	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					
	Progress work with CP Chairs and IROs in relation to risk analysis	Systems are used effectively to routinely monitor challenge log	IRO team manager			
	Challenge log developed to monitor issues raised with SW staff	Challenge log discussed at all performance clinics to ensure progress is made and themes are addressed	Ann Day/all service managers and team managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge log in place Standing Item on performance clinic agenda 	30 th April2016	

	Key tasks	Measure/milestones of success	Leads	Actions Taken	timescale	RAG
3.0	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					
	Education attendance monitored by SCU and reported to LSCB		IRO team manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance reporting provided by performance management Included in refresh of LSCB data set 	31 st May 2016	
	Guidance re-education attendance to be circulated	Improved information received from education including attendance at least part of reviews	Team manager IRO/Anne Muxworthy			
	Innovative ways of providing education input explored to facilitate better contribution from education colleagues		SCU/SW service managers		31 st May 2016	
5.0	Support care leavers to understand their health histories more thoroughly and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services					
	Increase capacity and support to designated nurse	Additional demand on health professionals met including development of specific offer to care leavers	Linda Hubbicks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Band 6 nurse appointed March 2016 	31 st March 2016	
	PA monitoring that care leavers are provided with their health histories		Lesley Thompson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health passport developed to include health histories Ensuring that care leavers are registered with GPs and Dentists Information collated for PAs to share with care leavers in relation to current services available to support health including mental health 	30 th April 2016	
	Transformation of mental health services takes account of specific needs of care leavers	Care leavers mental health is addressed	Gateshead / Newcastle / CCG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional mental health provision through counselling in place from 1.4.16 	1 st April 2016	

	Key tasks	Measure/milestones of success	Leads	Actions Taken	timescale	RAG
6.0	Devise a more effective way of communicating legal entitlements to all care leavers					
	CYP will be supported to share their experiences at regional care leavers conference focussing on care leaver entitlement	Care leavers report positively on their awareness of their entitlements	Chris Hulme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care leavers attended planning event in October to prepare for Regional Conference to be held 8th July 2016 Children's Commissioner booked to attend Developing the current information through IT and social media Further development of MOMO 	July 2016	
7.0	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					
	Protocol developed PAs work with providers to support care leavers	Increased numbers of care leavers complete their qualifications	Lesley Thompson / Steve Graham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with education and training providers 	30 June 2016	
8.0	Ensure the adoption panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel and adoption performance.					
	Analytical QA format to be developed for the adoption panel	Regular quarterly reporting in place	Elaine Devaney/ Ann Day/ Anne Roberts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QA format developed Fostering panel processes reviewed for learning opportunities 	June 30 2016	