



Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services County Durham

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Reporting inspector Fiona J Millns HMI

Age group: All
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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with 54 children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - analysis and evaluation of reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 58 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in February 2011
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from County Durham Primary Care Trust, County Durham and Darlington NHS Trust Foundation and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum

requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4) A service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

4. County Durham has a resident population of approximately 71,906 children and young people aged 0 to 17, representing 14.2% of the total population of the area. In 2011, 3.38% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 22.5% in England overall. Some 1.57% of pupils speak a language other than English (or believed to be English). Black and minority ethnic communities make up 1.03% of the population. The four most common non-English languages spoken by children in County Durham are Polish (143), Chinese (69), Arabic (55) and Punjabi (45).
5. County Durham has 284 schools comprising 227 primary schools, 34 secondary schools, 10 special schools, 12 local authority maintained nurseries and one registered pupil referral unit. Early years childcare service provision is delivered predominantly through the private and voluntary sector in over 87 settings and there are 12 local authority maintained nurseries in County Durham.
6. The County Durham Children's Trust was set up in 2008 and is responsible for delivering improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. The trust includes representatives of Durham County Council, County Durham Primary Care Trust and County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust services. Other representatives include the Community of Interest of Voluntary Sector Organisations, Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust, Durham Constabulary, further education college representation, Job Centre Plus, schools, parents reference group, young person's reference group and the 14-19 County Durham Partnership.
7. The Children's Trust Executive Board brings together key partners. Its purpose is to provide strategic leadership to ensure the development and delivery of improved outcomes for children, young people and their families and to implement the strategic decisions of the Children's Trust.
8. The Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) brings together representatives from all the key agencies and professionals in the county responsible for helping to safeguard children and young people. The Board became independently chaired in 2011.
9. At the time of the inspection there were 597 looked after children. Of these 31.7% are less than five years of age, 54.1% children are of school age (5–15), with 14.2% post-16 young people of which a total of 6% with care leaver status. At the time of the inspection there were 492 children

and young people who were the subject of a child protection plan. This represents a 12.07% increase since 2009-2010.

10. Durham County Council has 235 foster carers, 13 children's homes including one respite children's home, one emergency children's home and one secure children's home.
11. Safeguarding and Specialist Services (SaSS) hold the lead responsibility in working with partners on behalf of Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) and the County Council for the delivery of services to safeguard children and young people as agreed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Services include:
 - a wide range of specialist services that support children and young people who live with their families, helping prevent the need for them to become looked after. This includes emergency/out of hours services (including the provision of three placements which will support up to five siblings), therapeutic services, community based support to families in crisis, substance misuse services for young people and activity based support services
 - services for children and young people who are looked after, which includes residential care, fostering and adoption services, looked after social work services and a leaving care service called the Young People's service
 - services for children and young people in need of protection, which includes a range of services to support children in need and their families including disabled children and those who are privately fostered by friends and relatives
 - secure services that care for young people whose liberty has been restricted or removed
 - development and support services, including administrative support to SaSS, CYPS marketing and communications, the Children's Network and central management support and core services for CYPS.
12. Other family support services are delivered through 43 children's centres, extended services in schools and the Youth Service.
13. The commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care in County Durham is carried out by NHS County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trust. County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust are not part of this organisation but provide services commissioned by NHS County Durham and Darlington. The main provider of acute hospital services is the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust,

serving 520,000 people in County Durham and Darlington. The Trust was formed in 2002 to help acute hospitals to work together effectively to provide modern, sustainable hospital services and to improve access and choice for local people. The Trust has around 5,400 staff and 1,500 beds. Community-based child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are provided by the TEWV NHS Foundation Trust.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

14. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is outstanding. The Children's Trust demonstrates determined, highly effective strategic multi agency leadership with clear priorities and aspirations and a shared and sustained focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. There are highly effective links to the LSCB ensuring robust governance of the wider role of the Children's Trust in the planning and delivery of services. The strengths of the Trust are its well articulated common purpose and the resilience of all partner agencies in working imaginatively within a climate of change and budget reductions. There are effective links and shared, suitably ambitious objectives across the partner agencies which are delivering the priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), and the 'Think Family', 'One Point' and the 'Altogether Better' strategies.
15. Although the quality of provision is consistently good overall, there are certain elements, the common assessment framework (CAF), family pathfinder and responses to referrals where domestic abuse has been prevalent which combined with outstanding leadership have led to outstanding outcomes in ensuring that children and young people in County Durham are safe.
16. The Children's Trust in May 2011, recognising the importance of early intervention and prevention in work with children and young people to reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect, committed to providing a clear and seamless integrated multi agency service through 'One Point'. 'One Point' is a dynamic, flexible service, a 'one stop shop' for children and families offering support, advice and activities within the local area. It demonstrates highly effective use of resources and innovative, ambitious partnership working. Teams are based within locality areas, and team managers work with lead professional coordinators and staff drawn from health, education and social care.
17. There are strong and highly effective links between the council and voluntary and community sector organisations. Relationships are based upon good and honest communication and consultation. Voluntary and community sector organisations are well represented on the five Local Children's Boards in the county, established through the Children's Trust, and link well to the LSCB and the five health networks.
18. The council demonstrates a genuine commitment to consultation. Service users' views effectively and consistently inform service development. Exit questionnaires are routinely used within casework to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Feedback is collated, analysed and rated against set targets to inform improvements in practice and service

delivery. Targets are ambitious and in the majority of areas are achieved, demonstrating high levels of user engagement. The views of service users are highly valued and have shaped service provision such as in the development of short break services for disabled children and young people. These are highly valued. Children and young people contribute through the Investors in Children Service, to high profile issues such as obesity, emotional health and sexual health. The council has established 14 Area Action Partnerships for all areas of County Durham to enable communities to work with the council and its partners to improve services and address local issues. The Area Action Partnerships have developed their local priorities following consultation with young people. Young people carry out research on a wide variety of subjects and using different methods and models. For example, they have collaborated with research into social justice that is linked to Durham University.

19. Workforce planning is highly effective. Staff are supported through a wide range of internal training programmes. There are excellent opportunities to access courses from local universities. The council and staff have benefitted from opportunities to study part time for social work degrees and undertake graduate social work training. This has resulted in high retention rates and a reduction in the use of agency workers. Staff feel extremely well supported and are highly committed to their work
20. Leadership across the county is highly visible and accessible. There is a strong focus on performance management that continually drives improvement in services. The rigorous culture of performance management has demonstrated sustained improvement in the delivery of high rates of assessments done within timescales, low rates of re-referrals and the very low rates of children and young people subject to a child protection plan for more than two years.
21. Complaints policies are well developed and disseminated. The council has a robust approach to the collation and evaluation of complaints. Complaints are dealt with swiftly and most are resolved at an early stage. Children and young people have easy access to good advocacy services. This provides young people with confidence and assures a good level of independence.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

22. The capacity for improvement in safeguarding services is outstanding. County Durham has a clear vision setting out where its priorities lie, an ability to translate its aspirations into clear actions and a good track record of improvement. These strengths are supported by effective leadership, commitment to and understanding of the key priorities for safeguarding children and young people across the county.
23. Despite weaknesses in some areas of service provision such as in targets for children and young people not in education, employment or training

(NEET) the council has taken effective action to address the shortfalls. For example, Durham alongside Sunderland and Northumberland local authorities has been successful in securing a Social Impact Bond (SIB) to work on NEET targets as part of early intervention strategies. This is innovative and the first SIB to be achieved within the region.

24. Highly effective leadership from the chief executive, Director of Children's Services and senior management team is demonstrated through strong and dynamic partnership working and a clear focus on priorities. These priorities are translated well through strategic planning by the Children's Trust and the County Durham Partnership and through the Sustainable Community Strategy (Altogether Better Durham) and the CYPP. Priorities are clearly defined and form the foundation of the wider partnership approach to safeguarding and protecting children and young people. This is clearly demonstrated through the use of independent domestic violence advisers who provide specialist case work for high-risk victims of domestic violence. In addition there is a specialist and highly trained group of police officers within the domestic abuse unit which is improving the quality and reach of services to individuals subjected to domestic violence. The placement of a senior social worker in the team which screens domestic violence notifications has enabled improved consistency of decision making leading. As a result, more children and young people who are at risk of harm are more appropriately assessed at strategy meetings.
25. The rigorous and well established culture of performance management and quality assurance arrangements underpin the effective delivery of safeguarding services. The council and partners have a longstanding commitment to improve the life chances of children and young people whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. The work of the performance management group and LSCB prioritised 'neglect' and the increase in recognition of neglect by all agencies. This has ensured more timely and effective interventions to safeguard children and young people. The CYPP includes a number of locally determined targets for improvement alongside some that are nationally driven. For example, through targeted work services which are making a positive difference and giving young people a better start to school. This is resulting in the narrowing of the gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage between children in the most disadvantaged areas of Durham and Durham as a whole.
26. The council has responded effectively to the areas for development identified following the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements by Ofsted in February 2011. The electronic social care record has been improved and decisions to close contacts with no further action are seen and signed off by a manager. The quality of assessments is improving through effective management oversight and robust auditing but is still variable and the wider impact of equality and diversity issues is not always fully explored.

27. Actions collectively taken by schools and services are making a positive difference, for example, targeted work to give children a better start to school has resulted in 'narrowing of the gap' in the Early Years Foundation Stage between children in the most disadvantaged areas of Durham and throughout the county. This is also the case in primary schools where the proportion of children living in disadvantaged areas and those who are entitled to free school meals attaining Level 4 in English and mathematics tests has risen at a faster rate than for Durham pupils as a whole. Children and young people from the county's largest ethnic minority group, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, have historically achieved less well than their peers. Concerted action has taken place to tackle this. Where gaps remain a concern, such as the continued difference between boys' and girls' achievement, strong partnership between achievement services and schools is helping to develop further actions to meet the challenging targets that have been set.
28. Durham's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) clearly defines the ambitions of the council and its partners, reflecting the views and aspirations of the community and opportunities for improvement. The strategy identifies short, medium and long term priorities for the five key areas. These focus on five key areas: Altogether Wealthier, Altogether Better for Children and Young People, Altogether Healthier, Altogether Safer and Altogether Greener. The SCS links well to the aims and priorities of the Children's Trust, CYPP, early interventions strategies including 'Think Family', and additionally to integrated 'One Point' services for children, young people and families.
29. Lessons learned from serious case reviews are robustly monitored by the LSCB's Serious Case Review Monitoring Group using a specially developed Thematic Monitoring Tool. To augment this process, the LSCB holds annual multi agency conferences to report on the findings of serious case reviews and involve staff and managers in the learning process.
30. The council is good at recognising where service capacity does not fully meet demand and in taking effective action to address this for example swift action was taken to invest in additional staff and administrative support in the child protection and independent reviewing officer teams, in order to meet increased demand and sustain good performance.

Areas for improvement

31. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in County Durham, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Within three months:

- ensure that all children and young people are supported to fully participate in child protection case conferences and reviews where they choose to do so
- ensure that assessments take full account of the long term impact of parent's behaviour on children and that cultural issues such as deprivation and isolation are explicitly considered

The County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust should:

- ensure arrangements are in place to monitor and quality assure safeguarding children practice within its organisation
- ensure that health visitors, school nurses and midwives receive one to one safeguarding supervision on a regular basis
- ensure arrangements for the line management and resourcing of named professionals for safeguarding children comply with the Intercollegiate Guidance *'Safeguarding Children and Young people: roles and competences for health care staff'* (2010).

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

32. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are outstanding. Where concerns about a child or young person's safety are identified, effective, prompt and robust action is taken to reduce the risks they face and to protect them. The impact of this has been particularly noticeable where there have been repeated notifications of domestic abuse that historically had not been considered. The partnership has taken action to address this through the use of an independent domestic violence adviser service, and by providing a specialist and highly trained group of police officers within the domestic abuse unit to implement joint working arrangements and screen notifications. This strategy has already improved the quality and appropriateness of referrals made to the initial response team.
33. Outstanding work by the council and its partners in the area of neglect has ensured more timely and effective interventions to safeguard children and young people. This has led to an increase from 60.7% subject to a child protection plan in 2008 due to neglect to the present rate of 65.8%, and has contributed to the rise of over 200 children and young people who are subject to a child protection plan over the past two years.
34. The quality and availability of short breaks for disabled children and young people is very good and has substantially improved since 2009. There have been significant and effective levels of user engagement and very innovative use of resources and these have delivered a more family friendly service to support the most vulnerable children and young people in the community. The council has exceeded its own targets by 44,000 hours, delivering 114,000 hours of service at a higher quality, for a reduced cost. The reduction in the number of high cost cases has led to savings of over £1 million with no complaints from families in over 12 months and very high levels of parental and whole family satisfaction.
35. The participation of children and young people in child protection conferences is still at an early stage of development. The council plans to work with Investors in Children to improve participation in child protection reviews and conferences. Additionally independent advocacy services such as the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) and Natural Allies who support children and young people with disabilities have been commissioned to support improvement in this area. However, child protection conference chairs make good efforts to see young people before and after conferences to ensure their views are expressed and taken account of. Children and young people who met inspectors reported

that actions taken to support them had improved relationships within their families.

36. The local authority designated officer (LADO) is effective in ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded well and the management of allegations is subject to routine and appropriate scrutiny by the LSCB. Regular awareness raising briefings to community and voluntary sector organisations ensures the role is well profiled and that a wide range of agencies make referrals and ask for advice on safeguarding matters. In most cases lead agencies respond appropriately to child protection concerns and allegations, and immediate safeguarding needs are accurately identified.
37. Complaints are dealt with very effectively and at an early stage, as reflected in continued good performance. There has been a reduction of 3.5% in formal complaints since 2010-2011, combined with a rise in the number of compliments received. Lessons learned from complaints have helped to improve services for children and young people with a disability. For instance the number of complaints has declined as the general level of service has improved.
38. There are highly effective mechanisms in place to respond to and safeguard children and young people who go missing from home or education or who are at risk of being sexually exploited. Children and young people are identified early via the assessment arrangements contained in the recently implemented children missing from care and home protocol. Where risk is assessed as high the case is effectively dealt with at a senior level by the multi agency Missing and Exploited Group. Good examples were seen by inspectors of positive impact where risk has been significantly reduced and incidents of young people being missing have ceased.
39. Long-standing, highly effective partnerships between the council's achievement and inclusion services and schools is successfully helping to tackle inequalities and narrow the attainment gap between some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the local area and their peers. For example, the gap between children and young people living in the 20% most disadvantaged areas and the county's pupils as a whole is narrowing well, as it is for children and young people who are known to be entitled to free school meals.
40. Strong and long-standing partnership working between early years settings, schools and the Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement service is ensuring that the diverse needs and educational starting points of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people and their families are well met. As a result the gap between their performance and that of all children and young people in the county is narrowing well. Permanent exclusion rates for Durham pupils are reducing well and the council is

using strategies that include the development of a crisis response team who work closely with schools, young people and their families in times of significant need. For example, in the last year the team worked with over 107 children and young people and enabled nearly 90 to remain in education and avoid the need for permanent exclusion.

41. Case files scrutinised as part of the inspection demonstrate children's school placements are securing positive outcomes for them. Good levels of partnership working are ensuring that children and young people identified with complex special educational needs or disabilities and those with behavioural difficulties are also in appropriate education placements and are successfully supported to achieve well. Improved behaviour management strategies in schools are proving successful. These include support from behaviour and attendance teams, in-school support for pupils' emotional well being through counselling services, alongside a developing restorative approach to resolving conflict in school. Overall, the strategies are contributing to the significant reduction in the numbers of young people subject to fixed term exclusion which has reduced from 5.9% in 2007 to 4.7% in 2010.
42. Children and young people who spoke to inspectors say they feel safe in school, college and in their local communities. The anti-bullying service is highly regarded nationally and locally. It works on behalf of Kidscape to deliver the 'ZAP' programme, which supports young people who have experienced bullying and want to be able to deal with this and become more assertive. An evaluation of the impact of the programme demonstrates improved attendance of pupils, who as a result of being bullied, were prone to be absent from school.
43. Fostering and adoption services were judged to be outstanding at their last inspections in 2008 and 2011 respectively. Although the last inspection of private fostering in 2008 judged this to be inadequate, the action plan implemented after the inspection has now been fully implemented with the result that there have been secure improvements. Local children's homes are now judged to be good or outstanding.
44. Systems to ensure the safe recruitment of staff are robust ensuring that all possible measures are taken to safeguard children and young people. Criminal Record Bureau and identity checks are undertaken, including a three year rolling programme of renewal which is beyond statutory minimum requirements. Checks are carried out through human resource (HR) processes but to ensure further rigour, senior managers review and verify references and the content of applications. Interviewees' responses are routinely recorded and applicants required to explain gaps in their employment histories. Scrutiny of HR records by inspectors demonstrated exceptionally good practice, especially with most recent applicants for employment.

Quality of provision**Grade 2 (Good)**

45. The quality of provision is good. Early intervention processes are very well established and this has led to the provision of a wide range of effective services to support children and young people in the community with particular strengths in the quality of provision seen in the CAF, family pathfinder, and in responses to referrals where domestic abuse has been prevalent.
46. The CAF is being effectively utilised in a significant and growing range of services. The number of CAFs completed has risen from 618 in 2008-2009 to 1081 in 2010-2011 demonstrating a progressively responsive service for cases where statutory intervention is not required. Systems for escalating and de-escalating cases are well understood and used routinely to deliver services appropriate to changing levels of need. Children, young people and their families are fully engaged in CAF assessments and their views inform planning and front line work leading in most cases to positive outcomes and a reduction of risk. There is evidence of significant partner involvement both in taking the lead professional role and in team around the child processes.
47. Family Pathfinder teams successfully provide intensive support to families and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) through the pre-reprimand disposal scheme is effectively diverting children and young people from statutory provision. Family Pathfinder teams' good performance has led to a reduction in the rate of re-referrals to the initial response team from 27% to 20%. In 2009-2010 within 86 out of 167 families referred to the service, domestic abuse was a presenting issue, and the team's significant success has been demonstrated through a national evaluation undertaken by the Department for Education which evidenced good reductions in the levels of subsequent domestic abuse referrals.
48. 'One Point', launched in September 2011, is an integrated multi agency early intervention service which is locally based and responsive to the needs of families within the specific area. It is already beginning to show some early positive impact in reducing inequalities in children and young people's health, well being and achievement. For example, a behavioural support worker, based in 'One Point' is now working with co-located health visitors developing programmes more suitable for younger children who need interventions.
49. Ongoing research, in partnership with the police, on working with families who need intensive interventions under the umbrella of the 'Think Family' board is strengthening partnerships, and aims to focus interventions and information to better deal with service users who require the most resources.
50. Significant learning gained by the county through consultation with users of services, has determined that the quality of relationships between

workers and service users is key to achieving positive outcomes for children and young people and is being utilised to direct future service development. The service for children and young people with disabilities is presently delivered by a discrete team but plans are well advanced to co-locate provision within integrated teams with the aim of improving outcomes through a more responsive multi agency service.

51. Clear and effective contact and referral systems are in place within the Initial Response Team. Referrals are dealt with in a timely manner and cases are allocated to workers that are appropriate to their skills and experience. Staff undertaking Section 47 child protection enquiries have all completed Achieving Best Evidence training, in line with good practice. Management decision making is clearly recorded on case files. Contacts and referrals are subject in most cases to robust management oversight and decision making before a referral is closed or actions taken. Cases are reviewed regularly, and there is evidence of good standards of rigour in driving plans forward in child protection and child in need cases. School leaders report positive improvements in the responses to their referrals to children's social care and consider the timeliness and quality of response as always good, with thresholds for the acceptance of referrals being clear.
52. The scrutiny of children's social care files by inspectors demonstrated that assessments include an improving level of analysis and many now have an explicit analysis of risk and protective factors. However, overall the quality remains variable. Whilst in most cases seen ethnicity was recorded, in some cases the wider impact of equality and diversity issues were not explored fully. Record keeping is of at least adequate quality, in most cases is timely and evidences the implementation of planning. Chronologies are used routinely and are mostly of good quality detailing events with comments, actions and outcomes and demonstrating good social work practice.
53. The views of parents and extended family members are not consistently recorded explicitly within assessments but children and young people are routinely seen alone where appropriate. Parents spoken to generally felt they had been treated respectfully, their views listened to and taken seriously and some reported very positive change. There is a strong focus on partnership working with parents to prevent situations escalating to the point of legal proceedings being required to protect a child or young person. The Family Pathfinder service fully involves children, young people and families in assessment and front line work processes resulting in positive outcomes that reduce risk and prevent children and young people requiring the need for statutory services.
54. A good range of effective services links together well to support children and young people at risk of being accommodated or becoming subject to legal care processes. These include emergency day care, overnight

residential provision, residential respite on a short term basis, community support and family pathfinder services. All services work to a team around the child or care team model and provide responsive, intense involvement which enables children and young people to be promptly returned to, or kept at home or with family members.

55. Timeliness of assessments is good with 90.6% of core assessments being completed within timescales in the second quarter of 2011-2012. This is a better performance than that of statistical neighbours at 78.5%. Initial assessments too, are timely and demonstrate good performance, with 77.4% in the second quarter of 2011-2012 being completed within 10 days. Again, this is higher than that of statistical neighbours at 73.7%. Partner agencies routinely attend strategy meetings and take a full role in child protection core groups and child in need care teams.
56. The quality of child protection plans seen by inspectors was good and some plans were outstanding demonstrating a clear understanding of how services can be effectively employed to reduce risk and strengthen protective factors. Child protection reviews are timely, between 97% and 100% in 2011 (across different offices), and hold social workers and other professionals to account to ensure the progression of plans. Changes in individual needs are responded to appropriately.
57. Effective planning is very well established within social work practice and cases inspected demonstrated good and some outstanding work in children in need cases. There is clear evidence of plans being implemented by care teams who use imaginative means and all available community resources to deliver improved and positive outcomes for children, young people and their families. Family pathfinder cases also demonstrate good coherent planning skills that deliver intensive and structured programmes of work to families with complex needs. Planning is also strongly evidenced within CAF processes and is flexibly reviewed and amended by multi agency teams around the child to meet changing needs.

The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe **Grade 2 (Good)**

58. The contribution of health agencies is good. The cluster arrangement for County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trusts is long standing with good and well established arrangements for monitoring provider trust compliance with safeguarding children legislation. There is evidence of careful and sensitive commissioning, including many examples of joint commissioning, to reflect the findings of the joint strategic needs analysis and the priorities of the Children's Trust.
59. Darlington and Durham share an effective Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) that is appropriately constituted. The rapid response nursing team

ensures that families are supported well while enabling legal and forensic processes to be conducted sensitively. Findings from the CDOP have impacted positively on service improvement, and have led for example, to a redesigning of the care pathway for asthma management, to enable best practice in treating asthma in children and young people.

60. Children, young people and their families have good access to CAMHS across County Durham. Although there is variability in the way that referrals are assessed, performance is good with no delays in accessing services and there are effective arrangements for transition into adult mental health services. The Tees, Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust has a policy of not admitting any young person under 18 into an adult bed.
61. Health support for children and young people with complex care needs and disabilities is adequate. There are long waits for assessments and diagnosis for children and young people on the autistic spectrum disorder in some parts of the county and this is being tackled by joint commissioning. Parents and carers described good access to an increasing range of high quality short breaks and respite services, which is helping to build resilience within families.
62. The arrangements for the designated and named professionals for the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Tees, Esk and Wear Valley are appropriate. The designated and named professionals currently employed by the PCT are also a resource for the community based staff employed by County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT). They also work closely with the Named Nurse employed by CDDFT in relation to individual cases and agree attendance at meetings such as pre-discharge meetings and strategy meetings. However, the arrangements for resourcing named professionals for safeguarding children within County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust are not fully compliant with Working Together 2010 or the Intercollegiate Guidance November 2010.
63. Named professionals work effectively in support of practitioners, to identify and work with families and safeguard children and young people. They are routinely copied into referrals to children's social care services and offer advice on an ad-hoc basis as well as through supervision.
64. Governance arrangements for reporting on the quality assurance of safeguarding children practice within provider trusts are of acceptable standards in all but the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. The County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust's children's safeguarding committee is not attended by any divisional representatives other than women's and children's services and accident and emergency (A&E) staff. This is being addressed by the Trust.
65. Access and take up of good quality training and supervision for safeguarding children and young people across NHS providers is

inconsistent. A comprehensive training needs analysis has been carried out by the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust and a corresponding action plan is being developed to ensure all staff are trained at the appropriate level in safeguarding children. Good progress is being made within the Tees, Esk & Wear Valley Foundation Trust in identifying and training a cohort of staff to carry out supervision. This is less well developed within the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust.

66. Young people have good access to increasingly effective alcohol and substance misuse services and there is evidence of successful capacity building through training for universal service providers on substance and alcohol misuse by young people. The Early Intervention for Alcohol Team provides good support to families affected by alcohol abuse, through the use of a pre-CAF assessment. Work has started to improve the referral pathway between accident and emergency services (A&E) and the young person's drug and alcohol service for County Durham, 4Real.
67. There is good delivery of the Healthy Child Programme through integrated teams and there are good arrangements in place to support targeted intervention through CAF and child protection plans. Close working relationships between health visitors and school nurses helps to ensure that when children transfer into education, their health needs are identified and met. Partnership working between health practitioners and children's social care services is effective. There are clear escalation policies across the partnership to resolve professional disagreement on the outcome of a referral. Attendance at child protection conferences, core groups and CAF meetings are prioritised by public health nurses and this is monitored and reported on through the LSCB.
68. School nurses work effectively in supporting education staff in the delivery of sexual relationship advice in education. They also provide drop-in clinics at all secondary schools within the county and undertake the national measurement programme in children's reception year and Year 6. There are good links with contraception and sexual health (CASH) services to support those young girls who may require contraceptive prescribing or access to emergency contraception.
69. The redesign of CASH services have been influenced through consultation with young people and will increase availability of CASH services from the current five days a week to six. There is good access to emergency contraception and there is a very effective outreach service that works flexibly around the needs of young people who find it difficult to engage with universal provision. Conception rates are slightly lower than the North East average and the decrease in conceptions for 2009 is greater than the national average which indicates that the council and its partners are providing good support in reducing the number of teenage conceptions across County Durham.

70. Good arrangements are in place for midwifery staff to identify vulnerable females throughout a woman's pregnancy. Women have good access to a peri-natal mental health pathway if they require additional support for their emotional health and well being, although there are waiting times to access counselling support from primary health care workers. Good support is available for pregnant teenagers from a midwifery led course called 'Bambino's' and there are plans to increase the availability of further accredited training and support through the work of the Young Parent Support Worker.
71. There is good uptake by General Practitioners (GPs) in safeguarding children training, with all GP practices across Durham having a safeguarding lead. A safeguarding toolkit of documents and information, including policies, guidance and referral forms has been updated and distributed to all practices to ensure a consistent and effective best practice approach to safeguarding children within primary care. Particularly good safeguarding practice was identified by inspectors in one GP practice that is working closely with the health visitor to screen all new families registering with the practice. Following a recent serious case review finding, most GPs' practices now have regular meetings with health visitors and school nurses to discuss families where there are concerns. This has helped in providing a consistent and co-ordinated approach to safeguarding children and young people within families.
72. Good arrangements are in place to safeguard children and young people that attend urgent care and A&E at County Durham Hospital. There is adequate paediatric liaison and good awareness by care staff of the need to safeguard children and young people where there is evidence of domestic abuse, mental health or substance misuse in their families. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that child protection medicals and examinations following alleged sexual abuse, are carried out by suitably trained staff in an appropriate environment.
73. The TEWV NHS Foundation Trust is in the early stages of adopting the 'Think Child, Think Family' approach, designed to reinforce the need for adult mental health practitioners to consider the impact of a service user's mental health on any children in the family. Arrangements to record the details of children and young people of adult mental health service users continue to improve and there is ongoing development to refine the recording of the risk assessment. There are good arrangements in place to support and safeguard children and young people who visit parents on adult in-patient wards.
74. The impact of domestic violence in families on children and young people is well understood by health practitioners. Health agencies are represented on the local Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and public health nurses and GPs are notified of any domestic violence incident where the police have attended and there are children in

the family. This sharing of information helps to safeguard children and young people in families where domestic violence in families is prevalent.

75. Partnership working between health agencies and the council is very good with joint working to upgrade primary school kitchens and provide free school meals to all primary school pupils for a period of two years. This positively promotes healthy eating.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

76. Ambition and prioritisation are outstanding. The Children's Trust demonstrates outstanding strategic multi agency leadership with clear priorities and aspirations and a shared focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. The strengths of the Trust are seen in how successfully it translates its well formulated plans into improved services, as well as the determination of all partner agencies in working creatively and imaginatively within a climate of constant change and budget reductions. There are effective links and shared objectives across the partner agencies and at all levels of services.
77. Strong management and leadership by the LSCB and the council have led to improved partnership engagement and better attendance at child protection conferences by GPs and nurses. For example, attendance by school nurses increased from 78% in 2008-2009 to 90% in 2011.
78. There is a strong focus on realistic, yet challenging, target setting for improvement such as in the promotion of the United Nations' 'Rights of the Child' which is at the heart of schools' planning, policies, practice and ethos. Well established focus groups ensure that students have a strong influence on the schools' journey towards 'Rights and Respecting' status; 140 schools are working towards the Rights Respecting Schools Award and 99 schools have already achieved Investors in Children membership.
79. Elected members are strong and effective champions for the children and young people of Durham and are committed to improving their life chances wherever possible. The Overview and Scrutiny committee provides robust scrutiny of children's safeguarding services and the performance of specific strategic and operational work such as 'Think Family', special educational needs and rates of teenage conceptions. The committee uses consultation with young people to inform their work and is passionately committed to improving services and the life chances of children and young people in Durham.

Leadership and management

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

80. Leadership and management are outstanding. Innovative workforce planning and development is effective and well embedded in Durham and the workforce is representative of the community it serves. There are sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and experienced social workers

and staff to meet statutory requirements and deliver against stated priorities. The Safeguarding and Specialist Services recruitment and retention group has reviewed the workforce development strategy now that previous objectives have been met, and because there is lower staff turnover in the current economic conditions. As a result of the review they have set new, ambitious targets for human resource activities and for training and skills. These include the development of enhanced practitioner roles, succession planning, and assessment of the impact of staff absence and vacancies. The success of the workforce strategy is demonstrated, for example, by the Newly Qualified Social Work Programme, secondment programme and staff retention. The Future Team Manager Programme has also enabled senior practitioners to access specific management training previously only available to serving managers. Good performance is further illustrated by 77% of managers in 2011 having a management qualification from a starting point of 59% in 2008. The Social Work Improvement Fund is also used imaginatively to support and train staff.

81. Social workers seen during the inspection are passionately committed to their work, to improving children's lives and report that they are proud to work in Durham. They say they choose to work in Durham because of the extensive and sustained support they receive from skilled, experienced and accessible managers. Supervision is regular, of good quality and includes both case direction and reflective discussion. Training is described by social workers as excellent, the induction process is said to be very good and caseloads are appropriate to skill level and manageability. Senior managers are viewed as being supportive, visible and have high expectations of their social workers in terms of performance and quality standards.
82. There is robust evidence that service planning and delivery take account of the views of children and young people, their parents and carers. Investors in Children is actively involved in consultation work, for example, 20 young people contributed to shaping the new 'One Point' service which became operational from September 2011. Children and young people created a statement of their expectations of the new service, called 'The Promise' which has been incorporated into employment contracts and service specification.
83. A group for parents who have children with additional needs was set up following an Aiming High Conference and this makes a strong contribution to service planning. They report positively on the range of opportunities available to shape and influence services for their children and young people with additional needs or disabilities across the county. Approximately 200 young people and 50 parents have played a full part in shaping the proposals for the new front line contact referral and assessment service. They now feel that there is a shared vision for the future between parents and senior officers of the council.

84. The council routinely seeks feedback from children and young people when their involvement with a service ends and when assessments are completed. Their feedback is collated, analysed and rated against set targets to inform improvements in practice and service delivery. Targets are ambitious and in the majority of areas are achieved, demonstrating high levels of user engagement.
85. Resources are managed and prioritised very effectively and although there has been a marked increase in demand, Children and Young People's Services have secured £7.5 million for the growth of safeguarding services over a three year period from 2010. This includes £1.5 million to protect and invest in front line safeguarding services. Value for money audits are used robustly to evaluate service provision and have resulted in significant savings and more efficient use of resources, totalling £3.5 million. For example, the negotiation of contracts and scrutiny of invoices by the commissioning team has resulted in savings of £383,000 since July 2010.
86. The key achievements of commissioning are demonstrated through good partnership working, good value for money, the voice of the child being prioritised and regular feedback from providers. The aim of commissioning is to develop preventative and early intervention services and a holistic approach to the needs of children and young people and their families. Resources are used imaginatively and successful strategic commissioning is clearly demonstrated by the development and ongoing implementation of integrated service hubs through 'One Point'.
87. Commissioning between the third sector and the council is underpinned by routine and good quality consultation. All contracts meet stringent safeguarding standards, are subject to ongoing scrutiny, and expected to demonstrate improving and positive outcomes for children and young people. There is evidence of effective work with minority groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and of work to identify and provide services to other hard to reach groups. An example of highly effective work is in East Durham; £2.6 million was secured to provide a three tier prevention and intervention programme managed by the Council for Voluntary Service, Barnardo's and Action for Children, for the emotional well being of young people.
88. The council is good at recognising where service capacity does not fully meet demand and in taking effective action to address this. An example of this is seen in the investment of additional staff and administrative support in the child protection and independent reviewing officer teams, in order to meet increased demand and sustain good performance.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

89. Performance management and quality assurance are outstanding. Safeguarding and Specialist Services have a well established, rigorous and robust culture of performance management and quality assurance. Performance management arrangements underpin the effective delivery of safeguarding services and these are supported by extensive auditing of cases files, with 2873 having been undertaken in the 12 months up to the time of the inspection, by both senior and team managers. Alongside themed audits by the LSCB, these have had a positive impact such as improving GPs' attendance at child protection conferences. Specialist and Safeguarding Services audits are of good quality and in most cases their evaluation of quality standards is accurate. They cover all aspects of case work and include actions to address weaknesses or omissions. Findings are widely reported across the partnership to ensure that strengths and weaknesses are known and understood.
90. Sustained, very good performance, which exceeds that of statistical neighbours, is demonstrated by high rates of assessments undertaken in timescales, low rates of re-referrals and the very low rates of children and young people subject to a child protection plan for more than two years. Performance is less strong than comparators, however, in relation to referrals converting to initial assessments. The Safeguarding and Specialist Service evidences a comprehensive level of self-knowledge and demonstrates a commitment to using this information in order to perform very well. Performance management systems inform both practice and service development and have led to sustained improvements in performance from 2008 until the end of the second quarter of 2011-2012. Examples of improvement are: the reduction in the percentage of referrals occurring within 12 months of the previous referral from 24.2% to 20.8%; and the improvement in the percentage of initial child protection conferences held within 15 working days from 24.4% to 56.7%, however, this still remains below statistical neighbours at 63%.
91. Timeliness of core assessments is also very good, in the second quarter of 2011-2012 with 90.6% being held within 35 days, which is much higher than that of statistical neighbours at 78.5%. Timeliness of initial assessments is similarly very good, with 77.4% held within 10 days which is above that of statistical neighbours at 73.7%, although less than the council's target of 82%. The percentage of children and young people becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time has decreased from 19% in 2009-2010 to 13.1% in 2010-2011 and is well within the council's target of 16.0%. The council has also achieved very good performance in relation to children and young people subject to a child protection plan lasting two years or more.

92. Senior managers exercise thorough management oversight at all levels of the service, have high expectations of their staff and are routinely involved in making case decisions on particularly complex or intractable cases. Where service users have been violent toward staff or in cases of sudden child death senior managers move quickly to attend on site with front line practitioners, offering support and advice. Audits of casework are undertaken on a routine basis as well as more specifically to investigate a particular issue. There are clear expectations for the delivery of staff supervision and appraisal. Procedures have been reviewed to meet the needs of integrated team working. Records seen showed that staff receive regular, structured supervision to address issues of competency, training and caseload oversight. Supervision may also include observation of practice by line managers.
93. External auditing is used well. The Family Pathfinder Service has been comprehensively evaluated by an external consultant on the behalf of the Department for Education. The impact and outcomes for the families subject to this evaluation were indicative of the overall success of the project for families in helping them to achieve change with a reduction in levels of domestic abuse.

Partnership working

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

94. Partnership working is outstanding. All partner agencies in Durham are highly committed to safeguarding children and young people and work exceptionally well together to make certain that the most vulnerable children and young people are protected. The LSCB fulfils its statutory responsibilities effectively and has clearly defined priorities which include child sexual exploitation, mental health, early help and sharing information. Effective progress is being made in all of these areas and membership of the Board is representative of children's and young people's services within the county, and is complemented by the inclusion of a lay member.
95. Partner agencies are committed to improving multi agency working and consultation is used well, including using a 'blog' to ensure that priorities for the LSCB reflect, and are influenced by, issues that are important to children and young people. Durham LSCB evidences its influence and achievements locally and more widely through their development of a thematic tool to monitor serious case review action plans. This is recognised as good practice by Ofsted in the publication *Good practice by Local Safeguarding Children Boards* published in September 2011. Following a serious case review which highlighted concerns about the use of restraint, the LSCB has lobbied the House of Lords to effect changes in practice nationally.
96. As a result of training and work undertaken across agencies there has been greater clarity about thresholds and this has had significant impact

resulting in high numbers of referrals, increasing numbers of Section 47 child protection investigations and increasing numbers of children and young people on child protection plans due to neglect. A good quality and well detailed threshold document, '0-19 Integrated Pathway', is used consistently across the partnership. Managers and practitioners meet regularly and there are bi-monthly meetings with police and adult services leading to a better shared understanding of thresholds. Evidence from interviews and case file scrutiny during the inspection indicate that generally thresholds are established, understood and implemented.

97. There are strong and effective links between the council and the community and voluntary sector. There is good representation on Local Children's Boards across five areas in Durham and organisations link well to the Children's Trust, LSCB and to the five health networks. A support post to enable community and voluntary sector organisations to link effectively with the local authority was disestablished in December 2010. This role is missed but close working at a strategic level has been maintained and there has not been a dip in performance. Involvement of community and voluntary organisations is well embedded and these have been actively involved in the development of 'One Point'.
98. MARAC is effective, well established and considers every referred case for the impact on or presence of children and young people during domestic abuse incidents. Partner agencies generally attend meetings but when a pattern of non attendance develops the MARAC co-ordinator uses influence informally and formally to call partners to account. MARAC performance is outstanding with the rate for repeat incidents of domestic abuse at 15% compared to the national target of 28%. Recent effective partnership working has resulted in a senior practitioner being co-located with the Police since June 2011 to screen domestic violence notifications and decide which cases should be progressed as referrals to the initial response team. This has resulted in thresholds being applied more consistently and robustly.

Services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

99. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children in County Durham is good. There is a shared ambition by the council and its partners to ensure the best possible provision and outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers. Corporate parenting arrangements are good. There are 25 elected members on the corporate parenting group who champion the needs of looked after children. As a result, outcomes for looked after children are often good and improving. High quality, strong performance management arrangements ensure a robust focus on what is working well and what needs to improve. Decisive action is taken to tackle any areas of slippage against the partnership's challenging targets. For example, there has been good improvement in the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation as a result of the multi agency actions taken.
100. Political commitment for looked after children and young people is very strong and underpinned by sufficient, increasing and good deployment of resources. The workforce strategy is effective ensuring a good level of well trained staff sufficient to meet the needs of the growing numbers of looked after children. Commissioning arrangements are robust. Strong arrangements are in place to ensure that looked after children and young people placed out of the county in residential placements or residential schools access high quality care and education provision. All children and young people accessing such services are placed in settings judged good or better by Ofsted.
101. Involvement of looked after children, young people and their parents and carers in the development of services is exemplary and innovative. Looked after children and young people are regularly involved in the recruitment of staff to services that work with them and there are many consultative groups involving looked after children and young people. Children, young people, parents and carers all report they are well involved in their reviews.
102. Partnerships, including with schools and health services are strong and, along with good involvement from the voluntary and community sector, are helping to improve outcomes and the life chances of looked after children, young people and care leavers. For example, the proportion of looked after young people gaining five GCSEs at the age of 16 years is well above average. Looked after children and young people have good support for their emotional health and well being in schools and through access to services such as 'Full Circle'. Looked after children and young people and care leavers reported to inspectors and through surveys that they feel safe and that they live in safe placements. Permanency planning is good with high quality adoption and fostering services. Placement

stability has been targeted as an area for improvement by the partnership and actions taken are ensuring the gap between the performance in Durham and similar areas is narrowing well.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

103. The capacity for improvement is outstanding. Strong leadership within the council including political leadership is maintaining a successful focus of continuous improvement to services and outcomes for looked after children and young people. Strategic leadership is underpinned by a successful drive to learn from best practice, from serious case reviews and from sharing good practice regionally and nationally. This is evident through improving trends in key areas of performance, through regular reviews of strategic plans and through discussions with young people themselves during the inspection. Plans are built on thorough and honest evaluations of impact on key priorities for improvement. They are also built on the views of looked after children, young people and care leavers from the many events, conferences and consultations that take place with them.
104. Outstanding performance management arrangements ensure actions within plans are delivered in a timely way and secure improvement. This includes regular review of progress towards the challenging targets. Any temporary areas of underperformance are tackled immediately in order to drive improvement across the partnership.
105. Looked after children and young people receiving services report they are aware of how to complain and make representations and they have easy access to a good advocacy service. This is provided through the National Youth Advisory Service which provides children and young people with the confidence to make complaints and assures a good level of independence.
106. Workforce planning and development by the council is robust and ensures the partnership have the skills, resources and highly trained staff to deliver their priorities for improvement. Staff spoken to by inspectors described how they are held to account for their work through strong and regular supervision and are well supported to help them do their best for the children and young people in their care. Safe recruitment practices are strong and this makes sure that looked after children and young people are safe in their placements and in their schools.
107. Financial capacity has been increased in line with priorities and to match the increased demands of the increasing proportion of children and young people becoming looked after.

Areas for improvement

108. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and young people in County Durham, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure that all health assessments and plans are sent to the looked after child or young person's GP to ensure they have the most current information
- ensure that all looked after children and young people are visited regularly in accordance with statutory requirements and that children and young people who could benefit from an independent visitor are identified.

Within three months:

- arrange for regular audits for the initial health assessments to ensure and improve quality
- continue to improve the quality of assessments and recording ensuring that the views of parents and the feelings of children and young people are included
- ensure that allowances to foster carers are not delayed.

Within six months:

- address the delays that looked after children and young people experience in accessing CAMHS when placements are not permanent or court proceedings have not been completed
- revise the children's 'Pledge' to ensure that it meets the new placement regulations and ensure that the 'Pledge' is circulated and known to all looked after children and young people
- improve the identity, autonomy and accountability of the Children in Care Council
- ensure there is an ambitious target for care leavers entering higher education included within the Children and Young People's Plan and that services work together to increase the proportion of those who are able to move on to a university placement
- maximise apprenticeship opportunities for looked after young people and care leavers.

Being healthy**Grade 2 (Good)**

109. Health outcomes are good. Good arrangements are in place to maintain and improve the health of looked after children and young people. This is built on well established strong partnership working. All initial health assessments and corresponding health plans are carried out by paediatric trained medical practitioners and the number of assessments carried out within 20 working days continues to improve.
110. The majority (89%) of health reviews is carried out within 28 days of the due date. All looked after children and young people that had received their health review are up to date with their immunisations and vaccinations and all had visited a dentist at least once in the year. The lead nurse for looked after children audits all health reviews to ensure that they are of a consistently good quality and provides feedback to health visitors and school nurses within supervision. However, currently there are no regular audits of initial health assessments and those undertaken are of variable quality.
111. Good arrangements are in place to monitor the initial health assessments and health reviews of the small number of children and young people placed out of the county. Health representation on the Complex Care Panel helps to ensure the appropriateness of any placement for a child or young person and robust commissioning arrangements ensure provision is of high quality.
112. Looked after young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their health and are always offered a choice of venue for their annual health reviews. The Lead Nurse for looked after children currently runs the 'Girlz' group which meets fortnightly and which is facilitated by a therapeutic worker and together they work on increasing self-esteem, developing life and social skills and having fun.
113. There is good information sharing between the looked after children health team and social workers. The Lead Nurse for looked after children has access to the council's care planning database which helps to ensure a coordinated approach to all looked after children and young people's care plans.
114. All health assessments and plans are copied to the foster carer, social workers, health visitors and school nurses. However, under the current arrangements they are not sent to the looked after child or young person's GP as they had not previously wanted this information. This means that the primary health record for a looked after child or young person is incomplete and the GP does not hold the most current information about that child or young person.

115. Adequate arrangements are in place to ensure that the health needs of young people leaving care are identified and met. However, care leavers do not receive a comprehensive summary of their health history. Plans are in place to revise this letter once the looked after children health team has access to 'System 1', an electronic clinical system, which makes comprehensive health summaries available.
116. Looked after children and young people have good support for their emotional health and well being through the Full Circle Team. This team works specifically with children and young people who have suffered trauma and abuse and includes a social worker's support. Any looked after child or young person who requires more intensive or specialist support is referred to the CAMHS team. Currently there are no looked after children or young people waiting for an appointment either from Full Circle or CAMHS. However, foster parents report that looked after children and young people experience delays accessing CAMHS, as the service will not accept referrals until placements are permanent or court proceedings have been completed. This is leading to a level of unmet need for looked after children and young people.
117. There is ongoing work to develop the use of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires to further inform the emotional health support that may be required by a looked after child or young person. Currently a multi-agency group assesses any high score to establish the appropriateness of the care package. Plans are in place to extend this so that any young person with a high score is immediately offered a screening appointment, thereby providing an opportunity to identify early concerns about their emotional health and treatment at an earlier stage.
118. Looked after young people have good access to universal services for substance misuse and contraception and sexual health services (CASH). A CASH outreach worker supports those young people who require more individualised support. Looked after young people or care leavers that become pregnant are either referred to the Family Nurse Partnership or supported well within universal midwifery services.
119. Foster carers and council residential staff are well supported by the looked after children health team, Full Circle and CASH services and hold them in high regard. The Lead Nurse for looked after children has provided training on 'Speak Easy' to help foster carers tackle difficult issues with their foster children and young people. Children and young people spoke powerfully to inspectors about how well they are supported to lead healthy lives, for instance about learning about risks from smoking cigarettes. Care leavers also spoke positively about the health support available.

Staying safe**Grade 2 (Good)**

120. Safeguarding arrangements for looked after children and young people are good. Decision making on the assessment of risk is timely and ensures that those children and young people who need to be looked after are provided with placements that meet their immediate need for protection. More than three quarters of looked after children are placed with foster carers. The council currently has 13 children's homes and invests highly in this provision. Almost all looked after children and young people are placed in the council's own service provision which is judged good or better for safeguarding by Ofsted. The council's fostering and adoption services were judged outstanding for safeguarding by Ofsted at their inspections in 2008 and 2011 respectively.
121. The small number of children and young people placed in private residential care and independent foster care provision outside the county live in provision that is judged good or better for safeguarding by Ofsted. There are robust arrangements for monitoring safeguarding of children who are placed out of the county through the use of effective contracting and audits completed by the commissioning team.
122. All of the looked after children, young people and care leavers who spoke with inspectors and who responded to the council's surveys (the Care4me survey and the aftercare survey) report that they feel safe in their placement or accommodation and in the area where they live.
123. Currently there are no looked after children or young people placed in bed and breakfast provision. Whilst the policy is not to place children and young people in such provision there are rare occasions when senior managers sanction this to be used as a last resort for a limited time period to ensure young people's safety. When this happens, a high level of support is provided to the young person.
124. Performance in relation to the stability of short and long term placement is improving but performance is still at a lower rate than comparators. There has been increased pressure on placements, partly attributable to the increase in numbers of looked after children and young people within the county. Effective action is being taken to recruit new foster carers and a new residential children's home is to be built. Commissioning with other councils within the northern region is ensuring the quality and value for money of independent provider provision. Although there is only a small number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, specific bespoke provision has been made available to ensure their needs are very well met.
125. All looked after children and young people are allocated to a qualified social worker. Case loads are manageable and work is completed in a timely way. However, performance on the timely completion of statutory visits is not consistent across the county. Senior managers have identified

this and consequentially, action is leading to improvement to ensure children and young people are safeguarded.

126. The LSCB has good arrangements in place for the oversight of children and young people placed in secure provision, including scrutiny of reports on the use of restraint.
127. Good procedures are in place for monitoring children and young people who are missing from care. There has been improved information sharing and accountability between agencies to respond to missing episodes. Risks to children and young people are effectively identified and multi agency action is timely. Return interviews are used to identify risks in a child's development or more specific risks such as sexual exploitation and bullying.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2 (Good)

128. Outcomes for enjoying and achieving are good. The virtual school and role of virtual headteacher are making sustained improvements in the performance of looked after children and young people. They provide highly effective levers for change and improvement. For example, there has been good improvement in the attainment and progress of looked after children at Key Stage 2 and in the proportion of looked after students in Year 11 who attain five GCSEs grade A to C. Both groups are attaining above that found nationally for similar young people and the gap between their performance and that of all young people in Durham is narrowing well.
129. Taking their individual starting points into account, the gap between the progress looked after children make from Key Stage 1 to 2 compared that of pupils in Durham as a whole, is also narrowing well. Looked after children's current progress in Year 8 and Year 10 indicates pupils are making at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally outstanding progress from their individual starting points and is good overall. In 2011, looked after children's progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in the subjects of English and mathematics was slightly above that found nationally for similar pupils. Given their significantly lower than average starting points, this represented satisfactory progress overall. The proportion attaining five GCSEs including English and mathematics was comparable to that found nationally for similar pupils.
130. The virtual headteacher has good rigorous strategic oversight of the performance and achievements of looked after children and young people through very detailed assessments and tracking information on their progress that is gathered and reported at least termly. Progress is tracked meticulously and any underachievement identified quickly. The virtual headteacher works closely with the educational development service so that appropriate challenge is provided to schools to raise aspirations and tackle any underachievement. Key workers from the Looked after Children

Education Service (LACES) also put individual support and interventions in place to help looked after children and young people catch up quickly. Where underachievement persists, team managers work with key workers to develop further strategies for improvement.

131. The quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) is improving. Plans are reviewed within statutory timescales and all looked after children and young people are able to contribute to their reviews in the most appropriate way for them. However, not all are of good quality. Reviews of plans include information on pupils' current progress, mapped against individual targets for improvement.
132. There is evidence that LACES ensured good use was made of the personal education allowance for looked after children until it ceased in April 2011. There is good tracking information on expenditure against activities and good evaluation of the impact on outcomes. For example, those taking part in Letter Box Club, a fun programme to develop literacy, showed a 44% increase in reading scores. Support programmes for mathematics reported a similarly positive outcome. Looked after young people taking part in the Year 11 revision residential subsequently increased in the number of GCSEs they achieved. The team has now embedded evaluation of the use of replacement funding, the Pupil Premium, into the review of PEPs in schools.
133. Attendance rates of looked after children and young people are good. Absence rates are lower than similar pupils nationally and in 2010, placed the council in the top 15 of all councils in England. Absence rates rose slightly in 2011 but remain below the most recent comparator data available. Good and strong partnerships with schools ensure that looked after children and young people's emotional or behavioural needs are quickly met through a range of strategies. These include strategies such as social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL), timely access to CAMHS and targeted counselling services such as Full Circle. Strategies are making a positive contribution on young people's self-esteem and confidence and in reducing the proportion of looked after children and young people subject to fixed term exclusion. However, the proportion remains above the national average. The percentage subject to more than one episode of fixed term exclusion has reduced significantly, from well above to below the national average.
134. Close partnerships between LACES key workers, schools and achievement services who work to improve schools, have facilitated the year-on-year reduction in the number of looked after children and young people permanently excluded. The gap between all young people in Durham is narrowing effectively, although the rate remains above that found nationally. Current data shows that actions taken are continuing to impact positively and there were no permanent exclusions in the autumn term, representing good improvement on the same term in the previous year.

The majority of those permanently excluded attend the Pupil Referral Unit which was judged good with outstanding features at its most recent Ofsted inspection.

135. School leaders and designated teachers for looked after children and young people speak highly of the services and training provided by LACES, school achievement services and the added accountability provided by the virtual headteacher. They particularly value the timely interventions, challenge, support and guidance provided in times of greatest need. They feel they are held to account rigorously for the progress and achievements of their looked after children and young people through the target setting and PEP process and the termly progress data they provide to the virtual school.
136. Designated teachers now provide their governing body with a separate report on the achievements and progress of the looked after children and young people in their care. From these individual school reports, a virtual school report is being developed by the virtual headteacher so that the collective actions that services and schools have taken to improve the attainment, progress and achievement of looked after children and young people can be evaluated.
137. All looked after children and young people are placed in appropriate educational settings and are well supported. In 2010, the most recent comparative data available, a higher than average proportion of school-age looked after children attended a school assessed as being above the government's floor targets at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. An increasing proportion of looked after children and young people with complex special educational needs are placed in schools close to home. Only seven are currently educated in out-of-county residential schools three of which are within 13 miles of the local area. The schools attended were all judged outstanding or good at the time of their last Ofsted inspection.
138. Good actions are taken to ensure looked after children, young people and care leavers access a wide range of leisure and cultural activities. Young people's views on the need to have access to cheaper leisure activities led to the development of a Freedom Card. This card provides looked after children, young people and their foster carers access to an increasingly good range of free leisure and cultural activities across the county and in the northern region. Subsidised transport arrangements are provided to ensure more young people can benefit from the range on offer. Close partnerships with arts services and targeted services such as CATs, a team of trained experienced and qualified activity instructors, are also extending the range successfully. Looked after children and young people with additional needs now have access to high quality respite care and short break activities, developed by parents and carers and young people themselves and are consequently highly regarded by them.

Making a positive contribution, including user engagement

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

139. Making a positive contribution is outstanding. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are outstanding. The partnership has a strong and highly successful commitment to listening to and is successful in acting upon the views of looked after children and young people resulting in good opportunities for them to make a positive contribution. Outstanding features include the timeliness of looked after children reviews and the high proportion of young people making their views known within them.
140. Looked after children and young people routinely influence the shape of services and improve outcomes. Investing in Children (IiC) was established in 1995 as a partnership between Durham County Council and the NHS. Its purpose is to promote the human rights of children and young people. There are various groups within IiC, including the Children in Care Council, eXtreme, primary care trust involvement board, the young carers group and the respect group which meet routinely to address important issues such as teenage pregnancy, employment and education, and accommodation. They are regularly involved in the recruitment of staff and in the delivery of training to social work professionals and foster carers. Looked after children and young people with additional needs have access to high quality respite care and short break activities. These are developed by parents and carers and young people themselves and are highly regarded by them.
141. Elected members worked with looked after children and young people to develop a set of promises by the council, the Pledge, in 2008. The Pledge continues to be provided to all looked after children and young people in a range of information packs. The Pledge is used to assess the work of children's services. The IiC provides accreditation where teams can demonstrate that they comply with the expectations of 'The Pledge'. However, it has not been revised to ensure that it meets the new placement regulations and nearly two thirds of looked after children and young people who responded to the Care4me survey reported that they either did not know about the Pledge or had not seen it. Senior leaders are aware that the Pledge needs to be reviewed and are currently considering how to do this in the context of the highly successful mechanisms currently in place through the Investors in Children service and Rights and Respect strategies that are embedded in many schools and services across the partnership.
142. The Investors in Children (IiC) team uses young people to accredit services where services can demonstrate that they comply with the expectations of 'The Pledge'; this includes proving that they have consulted with young people and that things have changed as a result. Many schools and services working with looked after children and young

people have achieved this accreditation because of their commitment to listen to, and act upon their views.

143. LiC is highly effective in influencing change across the council. Looked after children, young people and care leavers report their wishes and feelings are taken seriously by the adults who care for them. They particularly value the work and support of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's). In recognition of their work, looked after children and young people have awarded the IRO service with the Investors in Children Award for the last three years. However, the Children in Care Council (CiCC) operating as part of LiC does not fully represent the views of all looked after children and young people, and there is no direct link to corporate parents. Senior managers are currently reviewing its functions to ensure it retains its identity, autonomy and accountability.
144. The complaints and representation procedures meet statutory requirements. They are very well developed and used successfully by looked after children and young people. Virtually all complaints are dealt with at an early stage and an increasing number of compliments are reported alongside complaints data which now outweigh the number of complaints. The arrangements for advocacy are very good and delivered through an independent advocacy service. The service is well publicised and take up is good. An evaluation of the service has identified a good level of service user satisfaction.
145. The partnership has made the reduction in offending behaviour by looked after children and young people a longstanding priority and the actions taken have made a positive difference. Rates have reduced significantly over time and are generally below those found nationally. This is a result of very effective action undertaken in partnership with the Police, the YOS and targeted youth work. The use of a restorative justice approach within the council's own residential provision has been highly effective and this is being rolled out successfully to schools across the area.

Economic well-being

Grade 3 (Adequate)

146. Economic well being outcomes are adequate. The impact of services to improve the economic well being of looked after young people and care leavers is adequate. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training has increased well, from 35% in 2005 to 73% in 2011. This is in the context of a rising proportion of young people in the region and nationally not in education, employment or training (NEET). However, around a quarter of care leavers are currently not in education, training or employment and this remains higher than the most recent information available for similar young people nationally. This is despite some very good arrangements in place to support young people into employment, education and training. There is a good take-up of education and employment for young people aged 16 to 18 years showing a

reduction in NEETs from 9.9% in November 2010 to 8.5% January 2011 at 19.

147. Transitions into education, employment or training are well-managed by key workers in LACES team together with the support from the team who support care leavers once they reach the age of 16, the Young People's service (working specifically with care leavers) key workers and the Connexions personal adviser.
148. Care leavers who spoke with inspectors say they feel well supported by the Young People's service. All looked after young people can take part in the Teenagers 2 Work project which provides targeted work experience for care leavers. Adult learning experiences also help to improve young people's basic skills and along with sessions such as cooking on a budget, provide good opportunities for an accredited qualification as well as learning from experts. A well-established mentoring programme is in place, involving 33 university students and a similar number of looked after children and young people aged from 10 to 16 years. However, there are no aspirational targets for progression into university in the Children and Young People's Plan. Currently only six young people are in university.
149. There are insufficient apprenticeships available to looked after children, young people and care leavers. The county is the largest employer in the local area and senior leaders within children's social care services are working with leaders across the council in their role as corporate parents, to provide more in-house opportunities. The children and young people's service improvement plan and the multi agency Looked After Children's Panel (MALAP) plan include actions to improve awareness and opportunities for apprenticeships. For example, training foster carers and residential staff on the benefits of apprenticeships and entry requirements.
150. Robust actions have been taken to increase the proportion of care leavers accessing suitable accommodation. For example, at 31 March 2011 the proportion was below target. Since then the proportion has increased significantly and current figures are above target and above the England average. The range of accommodation is increasing successfully and practitioners report that the care leavers accommodation and support protocol (CLASP) has driven the recent improvements. CLASP provides a multi agency response to ensure that the right services and support are secured to help young people move into their preferred accommodation. It has supported the rapid reduction in the proportion of young people going into bed and breakfast as a last resort. Currently no young people are in this type of accommodation. The significant increase in the proportion of young people who access supported lodgings is helping to build their confidence and skills into independence in a measured and safe way.
151. Care leavers who spoke with inspectors say they feel well supported by the Young People's Service. Young people who responded to the aftercare

survey also said the accommodation where they are living currently is the right place for them and at least good. However, support for care leavers is not consistent. Although the proportion of young people completing the aftercare survey was low, around a third of those who did respond felt they did not get enough help to get ready to leave care.

152. All care leavers have pathway plans that take full account of their views. Plans are of good quality and are monitored rigorously by key workers who are held to account well by senior managers for the actions planned and taken. As a result, outcomes for them are improving. Pathways into independence are flexible and sensitive to the individual needs of young people. Those who may need additional support beyond their transitions at eighteen continue to be supported by their key workers to ensure successful transitions
153. Transitions for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to adult services are improving. Good partnerships with the Making Changes Together parents and carers group, and the eXtreme group, a consultative group of young people with additional needs have resulted in a recently launched 'parents and professionals 'transitions protocol' aimed at improving transitions further.
154. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and refugees in the county is very small and they arrive with a diverse range of cultural, emotional, language and religious identities and needs. Services such as the ethnic minority traveller achievement service and the Children and young people's service work closely together to ensure their individual needs are identified within their pathway plans and successfully met.

Quality of provision

Grade 2 (Good)

155. The quality of provision is good. There is a shared strong commitment by senior managers, elected members and partners to continue to improve services for looked after children and young people. This is helping them to meet individual needs successfully and make a positive difference to the quality of services available. For example, council fostering and adoption services have been judged outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection in 2008 and 2011 respectively. All council children's homes have been judged good or better in their regulatory inspections. This is also the case for the residential or educational provision for the small number of looked after children and young people placed out of the county. Nearly all the children and young people responding to the council and Ofsted Care4Me surveys report the quality of care they receive is good or better with a high proportion saying it is very good.
156. All looked after children and young people are allocated a qualified social worker. More than three quarters are placed with foster carers and 80% placed within 20 miles of their home. A very small proportion of looked

after children and young people is placed in private or independent service provision and nearly all live in services judged good or better by Ofsted. There has been concerted action to increase the numbers of foster placements with some success and all children and young people are placed in suitable accommodation. However, there are currently insufficient foster carers within the council. A recent recruitment campaign resulted in a very good response from the local community and a high number of new applications are currently being processed. Permanency planning is good and successfully aided by the new Family and Friends policy which has led to the increased use of placements with families and good use of Special Guardianship and Residence Orders in the last 12 months. Performance on the numbers of children adopted is good and placed the council 15th out of all councils in England in the government's recent published performance table.

157. There are examples of good thorough work to prepare children for permanent placements such as through the use of life story work. However, some assessments do not always include the views of parents. Although a high proportion of children and young people who responded to the Care4me survey thought their last placement was made in their best interests many of them said that there was no choice in the placement.
158. Senior managers are aware that the stability of placements for looked after children and young people is not good enough and are taking decisive action to improve matters. For example, a new central point for the management of all looked after children placements has been introduced with greater control exercised in the use of independent fostering placements. This has already had an impact on short and long term placement stability, although proportions remain below that of similar councils.
159. Services respond promptly to make sure that when family and children's home placements breakdown, looked after children and young people are able to remain in their existing schools wherever possible. This is having a positive impact on children and young people's well being and progress in school. Looked after children and young people with disabilities and their carers have access to very good innovative short break services, developed following consultation with families and carers. Take up and satisfaction rates are high.
160. The electronic integrated children's system provides a sound basis for effective social work recording and case management. Record keeping is timely and up to date. Senior managers are aware that the quality of recording has been variable and actions are in place to tackle this.
161. Quality assurance procedures have highlighted past variability in the quality of assessments. Actions have been taken to improve the quality

across all areas in the county and the recent assessments seen by inspectors reflect this focus. They show improvement with some good examples of effective risk analysis and decision making. Improvements are contributing successfully to reductions in risk and the provision of effective care planning for children and young people. Targeted work to improve the quality of assessments and care plans is also ensuring that the diverse needs of looked after children and young people are explicitly stated and addressed.

162. Although children and young people are seen alone as part of the assessment process, not all are visited regularly in accordance with statutory requirements. This is impacting on the quality of care plans. The issue is subject to an action plan that is being rigorously monitored and the action being taken is now leading to improvement. In addition, children and young people who could benefit from an independent visitor are not always identified and managers are also aware that a small number of plans are out of date and do not reflect the current placement. However, a high proportion of children and young people who responded to the pre-inspection survey said they thought their reviews worked well and that they knew about and had access to their care plan.
163. Inspectors saw examples of good quality care plans which had been reviewed on time. Swift action has been taken to implement the care planning regulations. This includes the steps taken to ensure that children and young people are seen before their review and the implementation of a conflict resolution process. Performance in relation to timely completion of looked after children reviews and the high rate of attendance by looked after children and young people at their review, is very good.
164. Despite IROs having high case loads they provide a very good service in assuring the quality of social work practice. This includes good oversight of cases to ensure that timely action is taken and that the views of children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, parents and their carers are represented. However, inspectors identified a small number of examples where the lack of capacity impacted on the continuity of IROs for young people at their review. Action has been taken to address this through the appointment of two additional IROs. The annual report of the IRO service provides a quantitative evaluation of the activities of the service but opportunities are being missed to report on aspects of quality.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 1 (Outstanding)

165. Ambition and prioritisation for looked after children are outstanding. Highly competent senior officers across the partnership provide clear strategic direction and respond effectively to meet the complex and diverse needs of looked after children and young people. Prioritisation is based on a very accurate understanding of what is working well and what

needs to improve further. As a result outcomes for looked after children and young people are mostly good or better, for example the very good progress that looked after children make from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 and the low number of looked after children and young people who enter the criminal justice system.

166. The council has a track record of good performance on looked after children services and has invested heavily in providing good quality local care provision which is judged good or better by Ofsted. There is an increasing demand for services. Priority has been given to ensure this high level of service is maintained and that additional resources are provided to enhance capacity and to continue to improve services and their impact on the outcomes for looked after children and young people. For example, managers have taken prompt action to embed the Case Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations. This is leading to service improvement such as ensuring all looked after children and young people are seen by their IRO before their statutory review.
167. A strong emphasis on using early intervention strategies to safeguard children and young people and to ensure that families receive effective support is making a positive difference to the safety and care of children and young people at risk of entering care. The 'Think Family' strategy and development of 'One Point' demonstrate the partnerships' clear ambition for continuous improvement of services and outcomes for looked after children and young people.
168. The Commissioning Strategy for Looked after Children is strong, ambitious and building on the thorough analysis of need that has led to clear priorities and targets for improvement. These priorities feed into the detailed plans of the Multi Agency Looked after Children Panel and services working to improve outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers. Examples are the plans for the virtual school and the children and young people's service. Targets are ambitious and are monitored robustly and regularly through corporate parenting arrangements, scrutiny committees and children's social care service's performance management arrangements.
169. Corporate parenting arrangements are good. This work is supported by elected members who champion the needs of looked after children and young people in their good efforts to secure high quality local provision. Their work is supported by highly effective reporting by managers across the partnership. Their commitment is demonstrated through a very rigorous approach to Regulation 33 visits which is ensuring high standards of care and service in all local settings and which managers say is helping to hold them to account successfully for their work. Although corporate parents actively seek and act on the views of looked after children and young people through the Investors in Children forums, the Children in Care Council, despite some good outcomes, is not yet providing a fully

representative view of all looked after children and young people. The corporate parenting group know this and are taking action to make the Children in Care Council more effective.

Leadership and management **Grade 1 (Outstanding)**

170. Leadership and management are outstanding. Highly effective leadership from the chief executive, director of children's services, senior management team and the lead member for children and young people is driving successful, strong partnership working and a providing a shared focus on priorities for looked after children and young people. Priorities are translated well into strategic planning and targets of the Children's Trust and the Commissioning Strategy for Looked after Children. Priorities are clearly defined in all strategic plans and form the foundation of the wider partnership approach to safeguarding and protecting children and young people.
171. To ensure a focus on looked after children and young people at the most strategic level, the chief executive has regular performance meetings with the director of children's services and the head of safeguarding and specialist services to review impact of the partnerships work on outcomes. He is rightly proud of the commitment of elected members to their corporate parenting responsibilities. They receive regular information and presentations on the performance and achievements of looked after children, young people and care leavers from the virtual headteacher and are fully appraised of areas that need to improve and actions that will be taken.
172. Strong strategic and cross party political leadership is backed by the necessary financial resources to meet the needs of the looked after children population. At times of financial pressure the council has maintained its high level of commitment to its looked after children and young people. To meet rising demand and service effectiveness some services have received growth in their budgets. This has consolidated previous good performance and secured improvements where necessary. Thorough and effective regional commissioning arrangements have ensured that young people are only placed in private and independent service provision that has been judged good or better by Ofsted.
173. Workforce development is based on a thorough analysis of service needs. This has ensured the workforce has been increased to meet the rising demand for services successfully. There is good staff stability in the service because staff feel motivated, valued and supported as well as being accountable for their work through regular supervision, service planning and review. Those who spoke to inspectors report their case loads are manageable, and respect their senior managers whom they feel demonstrate a long term commitment to the service.

174. Staff have good opportunities for professional development both internally and externally. Newly Qualified Social Workers receive outstanding support including protected case loads and very good access to good quality postgraduate training. There is an extensive programme of professional development available for all staff with good take up across the partnership including schools, children's centres and the community and voluntary service. For example designated teachers in schools report positively on the high quality training and support provided to them to carry out their roles successfully.
175. Support for foster carers to help them meet the individual needs of the children and young people in their care is good and they speak very positively about the high quality training and support provided from the fostering team, Looked After Children Emotional Support (LACES) designated key workers, teachers and nurses. However, some report that some allowances are not being paid or delayed such as monies for school uniforms.
176. Strong strategic direction provided by the virtual head teacher and the head of achievement is leading to successful partnership working with schools to meet the needs and raise achievement of looked after children and young people. Senior leaders in schools report positively on the work of the LACES team and their impact on pupils' educational progress and well being.
177. There is a strong focus on promoting value for money and quality for money through effective commissioning, re-commissioning and decommissioning of services to ensure the individual needs of looked after children and young people are closely met. Regional commissioning arrangements have ensured that children and young people are only placed in private and independent service provision which is good or better. Very few looked after children are placed in out of county provision, this ensures that most children do not have to travel far from their local communities and families and is again providing good value for money. In addition value for money audits are used effectively to evaluate service provision and have resulted in major cost savings and efficiencies. For example, negotiation of contracts and scrutiny of invoices by the commissioning team has resulted in savings of £383,000 since July 2010.
178. Good links have been made with other councils in the region to share expertise and benchmark high standards for looked after children services across the region. For example, sharing good practice in successfully meeting the needs of asylum seeking children and young people and refugees; the workforce strategy has ensured that specific provision is made for equality and diversity and asylum seeking children and young people through a newly appointed enhanced practitioner.

Performance management and quality assurance Grade 1 (Outstanding)

179. Performance management and quality assurance are outstanding. Excellent performance management arrangements and quality assurance procedures ensure the partnership knows its strengths and weaknesses well. Priorities are based on a clear needs analysis. This leads to a comprehensive action planning process which is successfully leading to improvement in outcomes and service design. Scrutiny of performance includes rigorous review by the MALAP, Corporate Parenting Panel and strategic management teams.
180. Key performance indicators are monitored monthly, as is the performance of teams across the council. Monthly performance information is set against challenging targets for improvement and the direction of travel in a way that is transparent and clearly shows where improvement is taking place and where there is slippage against target. This ensures that rigorous recovery plans can be put in place quickly when targets are at risk of not being met. Auditing arrangements for social work practice have been particularly effective at tackling specific performance indicators to improve performance across teams. For example, good, decisive and determined action has been taken to tackle issues in one area of the county where the statutory visiting of looked after children and young people was falling below the required high standard.
181. Auditing arrangements for children's social care services have been particularly effective at tackling specific performance indicators to ensure performance targets are met. Auditing processes are subject to continual review for example, recent work has been undertaken to strengthen the extent to which equality and diversity issues are being tackled and this is improving the quality of assessments and care plans.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Outstanding
Quality of provision	Good
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Good
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Outstanding
Partnership working	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Outstanding
Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Outstanding
Economic well-being	Adequate
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good