

North Yorkshire County Council

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children Board¹

Inspection date: 30 April 2014 – 21 May 2014

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The overall judgement is good	
The local authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Good

The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is **good**.

The LSCB coordinates the activity of statutory partners and has mechanisms in place to monitor the effectiveness of local arrangements.

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

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Section 1: the local authority

Summary of key findings

This local authority is good because

1. North Yorkshire Council has taken very positive action to improve the quality of its children's services. Over the past year a newly appointed but experienced Director of Children's Services and his leadership team, underpinned by a robust leadership pledge, have changed the culture in North Yorkshire. This has led to significant improvements in partnership working, the quality of services and the outcomes achieved by children and young people.
2. During this inspection services have been judged to be good. The authority has an ambition for its services to be outstanding to ensure local children and young people have the very best start in life. There are clear plans for this to be achieved. Very good longer term financial planning has been established to ensure the sustainability of the services for children, young people and their families over the next five years.
3. Performance across a broad range of indicators is generally good or better than statistical neighbours and this good performance is sustained or improving against almost all indicators. Quality assurance arrangements have focused on measuring whether a process occurs and the timeliness of performance rather than the impact and experiences of children and young people. The authority is aware that this requires further development.
4. Early help services are good. Children who are the subject of concern about their welfare or who are at risk of harm are identified, supported and protected well. The Signs Of Safety (SOS) methodology is now used across the county effectively to assess and manage risk. Children only become looked after if they need to be and families receive good support to address the issues which may put children at risk of becoming looked after.
5. Children at most risk experience timely and effective multi-agency help. Strategy meetings are a real strength in North Yorkshire with excellent engagement by the police and other agencies. Child protection conferences are chaired effectively. Commitment to providing a service to older young people in need is particularly evident.
6. Inspectors saw much good work carried out by social workers to help children and their families. In a small number of cases the performance monitoring systems had not alerted senior managers to practice issues seen by inspectors, where decisions were being made about stepping up or stepping down local authority support. Most of these decisions related to complex family situations where domestic abuse was a major factor. No children were seen to be at risk in these cases as multi-agency services continued to support children, although

this meant that a very small number of children did not receive services to meet their needs in a timely way.

7. Planning to provide children with a permanent home begins as soon as they become looked after and, where needs are not complex, this is achieved with minimal delay. Children enjoy positive and stable relationships with their social workers who in the main visit regularly, help them to feel valued and undertake purposeful direct work.
8. Council members show an improved and good understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities including for children placed out of area. One excellent recent example of their work was the visit by two members, including the Lead Member, to Wetherby Youth Offenders Institution to see a care leaver placed there following a sentence for a serious offence.
9. Despite the good support looked after children receive, some of the children's chances of achieving good examination results are significantly below those of other children. Health support for children looked after, including care leavers, needs further development to ensure health passports are available and GP and dental checks are made. Surveys of children's emotional and mental health could be used more purposefully to support looked after children in their placements.
10. Adoption support is good with some outstanding features. There is good preparation, training and support for adopters. There has been an increase in the number of adopters from 38 in 2013 to 50 in 2014. An ambitious target has been set by the local authority of 70 for 2014–15. In 2013, 21 children were adopted with 35 children being adopted in 2014, which is an improving trend.
11. Care leavers are well supported by the dedicated service and their personal advisors. Plans do not, however, always contain full detail to reflect the support provided. Both academic and wider success is well celebrated and young people feel justifiably proud of their achievements. Good educational provision is in place for care leavers, the majority of whom are attending local further education colleges, other education and training or university. There are 23 care leavers currently being well supported at university.

What does the local authority need to improve?

Areas for improvement

12. Ensure that the experiences of children and young people are systematically evaluated as part of the local authority quality assurance framework.
13. Improve the rigour of decision making when deciding to step up or step down local authority support, in particular where there is a complex family history including domestic violence.
14. Improve the quality of the recording of plans, in particular early help and pathway plans. This should include a clear identification of the areas in need of change to enable a better evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken.
15. Ensure that all children looked after have up-to-date medical assessments, immunisations, developmental checks and regular dental checks and that all care leavers have access to their health histories.
16. Continue to improve access to child and adolescent mental health services for all looked after children; in particular ensure strength and difficulty questionnaires are used purposefully to assist individual planning.
17. Ensure that all looked after children make good or better progress at each key stage of their education, particularly in Key Stage 4.
18. Ensure life story work is provided in a timely manner to all looked after children who would benefit from this.
19. Ensure that the needs of all children arising from age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language race and sexual orientation are addressed in all assessments and care plans.

Information about this inspection

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

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

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

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

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

The inspection team consisted of nine of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Neil Penswick HMI

Team inspectors: Sarah Urding HMI, Carolyn Spray HMI, Nicholas McMullen HMI, Pam Blackman HMI, Fiona Parker HMI, Gary Lamb HMI, Ali Mekki HMI, Chris Williams HMI and Dominic Porter-Moore.

Information about this local authority area²

Children living in this area

- Approximately 120,136 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in North Yorkshire. This is 22% of the total population in the area. Around 40% of children and young people live in either the Harrogate or Scarborough District.
- Approximately 12% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 9% (the national average is 18%)
 - in secondary schools is 7% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7.4% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are White Other (2.2%) and Mixed (1.8%).
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 4% (the national average is 18%)
 - in secondary schools is 3% (the national average is 14%).
- North Yorkshire is the largest geographic county in England, split into seven districts. Children live in communities which range from isolated rural settlements and farms to market towns, seaside resorts and larger urban conurbations. The county is also home to a significant military presence, including the British Army's largest garrison at Catterick in the north of the county, and around 3,000 children have at least one parent or carer serving in the armed forces.

Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2014, 3,421 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service³. This is a decrease from 3,679 at 31 March 2013.

² The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

³ Based on number of open CiN cases and number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan

- At 31 March 2014, 377 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a decrease from 427 at 31 March 2013.
- At 31 March 2014, 18 children lived in a privately arranged foster placement. This is a decrease of one in comparison with 31 March 2013.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2014, 465 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 39 per 10,000 children). This is a decrease from 489 (41 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2013. Of this number:
 - 92 (or 20%) live outside the local authority area
 - 34 live in residential children’s homes, hostels or secure units, of whom 26.5% live out of the authority area
 - 13 live in residential special schools, of whom 76.9% live out of the authority area
 - 335 live with foster families, of whom 18.5% live out of the authority area
 - 28 live with parents, of whom 17.9% live out of the authority area.
- In the last 12 months:
 - There have been 30 adoptions
 - 17 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 161 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 4.3% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 25 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates six children’s homes, all of which were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of North Yorkshire’s safeguarding arrangements was in October 2012. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- The previous inspection of North Yorkshire’s adoption service was in May 2011. The local authority was judged to be outstanding.
- The previous inspection of North Yorkshire’s fostering service was in March 2012. The local authority was judged to be satisfactory.

- The previous inspection of North Yorkshire's private fostering service was in November 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

Other information about this area

- The Director of Children's Services has been in post since April 2013.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since August 2013.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection are good

20. Children of all ages and families are supported well by a wide range of early help services. These are effectively coordinated through multi-agency screening service meetings chaired by Early Intervention Managers. Multi-agency support using the common assessment and team around the child activity is effective and as a result the number of these family based meetings has increased to over 1,400 meetings undertaken during 2013. This is providing good quality assistance to those needing additional help. Parent Support Advisors provide tailored interventions both at children's centres and in the home. Practice is soundly based on the Signs of Safety model. Professionals providing early support know the children well. However, the high quality of the work is not always reflected in the recording of plans, which sometimes lack detail of how the success will be measured.
21. Activities based in schools and children's centres and targeted youth work are highly effective for children of all ages. The widespread use of the 'Vulnerability Check List' means all agencies have a thorough understanding of thresholds when accessing early help or more specialist services. Step up and step down arrangements from children's services generally work well. The outcomes meetings chaired by social care team managers are effective forums to identify timely additional support for children with increasing complex needs. This is particularly the case where early intervention services have not resulted in sufficient improvements in children's circumstances.
22. Children who are the subject of concern or at risk of harm are identified, supported and protected very well. Contacts are effectively and efficiently screened by the local authority customer service contact centre. When referrals progress to assessments, highly effective daily screening and allocation meetings take place. These apply the Signs Of Safety (SOS) model to identify risk and need in order to determine the required action. This provides clear early direction for social workers to ensure responses are proportionate to vulnerability and children and families are not subjected unnecessarily to child protection processes.
23. There is a very good performance of completing assessments promptly. 89.9% of initial assessments are completed within 10 days and 92.7% of core assessments within 35 days. However, the rate of the referrals which result in an assessment is low at 70.2%. Inspectors looked specifically at this issue and identified that the decision making about whether to conduct an assessment in a very small number of cases lacked sufficient rigour. No children were at risk in the cases seen, but in this very small number of cases services were not provided in a timely way. Assessments are in the main good and well recorded and the application of the SOS model in the assessment process is enhancing the engagement of parents and children and the quality of analyses.

24. The out of hours service also covers York City. It is co-located with the Customer Service Contact Centre and this has improved the speed of service response. There is sufficient capacity to respond to all children who need protection out of office hours. The service can draw on additional support provided by outreach workers to enable children to remain safely in their homes until plans can be put in place by daytime workers. The service has a good working relationship with police, who assist when the geographical size of the county could hinder a speedy response. As a result, children's immediate welfare is assured.
25. Catterick Garrison, the largest army base in Europe, is in North Yorkshire. The authority is supporting very well the army families living on or around the base. These families can access a good range of early help services and appropriate referrals are made if needs meet the threshold for children's social care services. Where there are higher levels of need, families are supported by good information sharing and partnership working with the army welfare services.
26. When there are child protection concerns, children experience timely and effective multi-agency help. Face to face strategy meetings are a real strength in this local authority. They are prioritised by all partner agencies, provide a forum for very good quality information sharing and ensure a swift and appropriate response to children in need of protection. Decision making in section 47 investigations is robust and responsive to the emerging and known risks in a case. Child protection conferences are chaired effectively by the independent reviewing officers (IROs). They are child focused, ensure concerns are shared and understood and establish plans that keep children safe. IROs meet with children prior to meetings and provide effective challenge when plans are not delivered in a timely way.
27. Social workers have manageable caseloads and this enables regular and frequent contact with children and their families, and there is considerable evidence of high quality direct work with children using SOS tools. Social workers talk knowledgeably about the children that they are working with and are sensitive to their needs, wishes and feelings. Children and young people are listened to and services tailored accordingly. They are always visited and seen alone. The voice of the child is evident in all of the case file records.
28. Social workers make good use of the range of preventive and supportive services and programmes, such as Making Safe and Project 6, which assist families affected by substance misuse, domestic violence and poor mental health. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences function appropriately across the county and make decisions informed by good quality risk assessments to provide coordinated support to those most at risk from domestic violence. Adult mental health agencies are involved well in the formulating and delivery of multi-agency child protection plans where necessary.
29. Children with more complex and enduring needs receive a quality service from the Disabled Children's Team. There is clear guidance in place regarding

thresholds for services for disabled children. An annual grant is available on submission of proof of diagnosis and this reduces bureaucracy and supports families promptly. There is also a variety of short breaks provision that can be accessed through a county-wide resource panel.

30. Core groups and child protection conferences seen by inspectors were of a high quality, engaging children and families well. Due to the good engagement with families many children are stepped down from child protection plans very quickly to be supported by high quality multi-agency child in need plans. This has resulted in the number of children subject to formal child protection plans reducing and continuing to reduce. However, of the 377 children subject to child protection plans at 31st March 2014, 22.5% were repeat child protection plans. Inspectors scrutinised these cases and identified that most had been re-referred due to other concerns or there had been no issues about the care of the children for a considerable period. In some cases, however, the step down arrangements had been initiated before the sustainability of change had been fully demonstrated. This was particularly when there was a history of domestic abuse and complex family situations. As almost all of these cases children became the subject of a child in need plan and this ensured that the safety of these children was not compromised, though this resulted in a very small number of children not receiving services to meet their needs in a timely way.
31. The quality and timeliness of case recording is good. Almost all case records seen provide a good level of detail about the work undertaken and chronologies are in place for most children. Management oversight and decision making is clearly evidenced on the child's case file and on supervision records, which provides effective assurance and direction on the quality of the work. The voice of the child is a strong feature of the case recording. This is achieved by the excellent engagement by the social workers with families, the good advocacy services (particularly for older children) and the prioritisation given to the recording of children's views by the authority following deficiencies seen in the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. However, assessments and plans do not consistently take into account disability, ethnicity and personal identity needs, although some good practice by workers was seen.
32. Commitment to providing a service to older young people in need or in need of protection is particularly evident. Specialist Housing support services located in 16 to 25 year-old service hubs provide dedicated support to 16 and 17 year-olds at risk of homelessness. They work preventively with targeted youth support and only where their homelessness cannot be resolved will the young person be referred to social care.
33. Robust arrangements are in place to manage allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals. Clear pathways effectively ensure that children's needs for immediate protection are prioritised. The response is timely and cases are effectively managed. The Local Authority Designated Officer makes an effective contribution to policy developments and

training to further raise awareness and contribute to best practice within children's services and other agencies.

34. The North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board oversees the work involved in identifying children and young people vulnerable to child sexual exploitation (CSE) or missing from home, care and education. Children missing from home and those at risk of CSE are identified, tracked and monitored. A combined risk assessment tool that incorporates CSE is now in use which helps identify if this is a feature in a missing episode. Strategic management meetings are held where children have been assessed as high risk and this ensures that all relevant intelligence is shared and acted upon.
35. Secure arrangements are in place to ensure that those children who are reported missing from education are followed up swiftly by the Missing from Education Co-ordinator. Where risk factors are identified, appropriate referrals are made to other agencies, including the police. Details of all children missing from education are registered on the main education database. The authority has good links with the Army Welfare Service and this assists in resolving issues when service families are posted elsewhere at short notice. As a result the Missing from Education Welfare Co-ordinator is tracing a very small number of children whose current whereabouts are unknown.
36. The local authority has a pro-active approach to identifying and safeguarding children who are privately fostered. Most notifications and initial visits are timely with support available for children who are assessed as needing more than regular statutory visiting. The local authority audits its private fostering work annually and this has led to significant improvements in the quality of services.
37. Most social workers receive regular supervision which incorporates discussion of cases, opportunities for reflection and the progress of the social worker's professional development. Team meetings are used to disseminate and discuss information, such as learning from Serious Case Reviews, as well as providing a forum for group reflection. Sign of Safety team meetings also take place to enable discussion of complex cases and this improves and enables good practice.

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence are good

38. Edge of care services are extensive and of high quality. They are responsive to individual needs and circumstances and, where necessary, provide intensive support to prevent family breakdown and address the issues which are putting children at risk of becoming looked after. For instance, the Family Intervention Service (FIT) provides excellent support to families by applying a holistic Think Family approach, utilising evidence-based models. FIT delivers the Strengthening (Troubled) Families programme (which has received a very positive evaluation from the Department of Education), the Mellow Parenting programmes and Family Group Conferences.
39. Decisions about whether children and young people should become looked after are soundly based and timely, and include using legal interventions when in a child's best interests. Public Law Outline processes are used effectively to involve parents. Care proceedings are well managed so that planning for children's futures is not delayed. The local authority's own data is showing a very good performance, with the average time for completion being within 23 weeks, against the government's target of 26 weeks. Strong partnership working with the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and with the judiciary helps achieve this. Both report very positive working by the local authority.
40. Planning to provide children with a permanent home begins as soon as children become looked after, with 61% of children achieving this in less than 20 months, which is very good in comparison to the national performance. Children receive good support once a permanent home has been provided whether this is adoption, with other carers or back home with their families. Effective use is made of Special Guardianship Orders and financial support for placements with connected persons. This means children are enabled to live with carers from their extended family first when this best meets their needs.
41. Services are sensitive to circumstances changing and identify when children may be able to return home. When this is the case, rehabilitation is based on a robust assessment, decision making is sound and the return home is well supported and monitored. As a result of the intensive efforts to support children and young people there has been a reduction in the numbers of children looked after from 489 to 465 over the past year.
42. Placement commissioning is good and improving. The local authority has a good sufficiency strategy based on a robust analysis of current strengths and gaps. This has informed targeted work in a range of areas, including placements for older children, permanent foster care and in specific geographic areas. Only 6.1% of children experience three or more moves of placement compared to 11% nationally.

43. The vast majority of children and young people live in good quality placements with carers committed to meeting their needs. This includes the local authority's six children's homes, all of which have a track record of good or better inspection judgements.
44. While a number of children are placed just outside the county border, fewer are placed at a significant distance and only where children's needs require more specialist care. These placements are carefully chosen and monitored and provide good quality care. This includes ensuring that children's education and health needs are met. Children are visited regularly and helped to keep contact with their families. Two children in such placements, spoken to by inspectors, felt well supported and were content with where they were living. However, in both cases, providers reported that they had not been given all the written information they needed in good time.
45. Due to the excellent workforce stability, most children enjoy positive and stable relationships with their social workers. They are visited regularly, helped to feel valued and are well supported by purposeful direct work. Appropriate attention and resource is committed to helping children maintain contact with their family. Case recording is up to date and thorough and usually includes an up-to-date assessment and care plan.
46. Most older children benefit from good quality placements. Some older teenagers wait too long before a permanent foster placement for them is found. The local authority has identified this as a shortfall and is taking action to improve care planning and placement provision for these children. Life story work is of a high quality when it is completed, but the authority has recognised that some children are waiting too long to have this completed and inspectors saw evidence of this during the inspection.
47. Most looked after children have a range of adults they feel they can trust and go to for support or advice. This includes access to an independent advocate or independent visitor. Not all of the children and young people spoken to by inspectors said they knew how to make a complaint but all felt supported and that issues of concern to them are taken seriously. One child summed this up as 'I would trust my social worker with my life.'
48. Disabled children with complex needs benefit from high quality placements that meet their individual needs. Specific needs of looked after children arising from their culture, ethnicity or language are identified in most cases and some excellent examples were seen of these being addressed.
49. Services respond appropriately and there is good information sharing and tracking if a looked after child goes missing. The patterns of risk taking behaviour are analysed and effectively responded to and this is good practice. Workers have a good awareness of the risks of CSE and consider this in their risk assessments and planning.

50. Foster carers met during the inspection were very positive about support and training from the Fostering Service. They stated that they increasingly felt part of the team around the child. They valued the 'Max Card' which can be used for a range of activities for the carers and placed children and young people. Their experience of social workers varied from the very good to reports of perfunctory engagement.
51. The treatment fostering team has improved the quality of child and adolescent mental health support to looked after children and it is generally of a high standard. It has a psychotherapist post which, although primarily used to support treatment foster carers, provides practical advice and guidance to all carers and fostering social workers. Carers and fostering social workers also receive therapeutic intervention training with 120 foster carers trained to date and 70% of fostering social workers. The service also has a dedicated out of hours fostering duty rota in partnership with York City Council which can provide advice and services if required. This contrasts well with the variable quality of support and access to CAMHS provided previously, as seen on the casefiles examined by inspectors. Strength and difficulty questionnaires are regularly completed for looked after children but it is often not clear how these have been used to improve children's well-being.
52. Looked after reviews are held regularly and are effectively chaired by IROs who will usually be well known to the child. Children are well supported to participate in their reviews and IROs ensure that their voice is heard and they challenge on their behalf. Children are now seen by their IRO before their first review and between reviews if their situation is more complex. IRO caseloads were higher than the national average, resulting in some cases not receiving high quality support. The authority recognised this and work has been undertaken to resolve this issue.
53. Children receive good support from their social worker, carers and the Education Looked After Children (ELAC) Virtual School service to achieve well at school. The vast majority of looked after children in North Yorkshire attend good or better schools. The majority of personal education plans (PEPs) seen by inspectors are well prepared and fit for purpose. The PEPs contain clear, and in some instances ambitious, educational targets both short-term and long-term. Plans effectively identify what help and support is needed to assist each child to achieve and who will provide the assistance and by when.
54. No looked after child has been permanently excluded in the last three years and fixed term exclusions are reducing. Where young people are in alternative provision such as the Pupil Referral Units, this is well monitored by the ELAC Virtual School to ensure that each young person receives at least 25 hours of good quality education to suit their individual needs.
55. Despite the good work of the virtual school in carefully monitoring and tracking the progress of each child, looked after children do not do as well as their peers in North Yorkshire and this gap is not closing for children at some stages of

their education. Attainment varies significantly between year groups as the numbers in each cohort can be very small. The largest attainment gap in 2013 was in Key Stage 4 where attainment for this group achieving five A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics was very poor at 4% and significantly below the national rate of 16%. However, inspectors scrutinised this in great detail and a significant number of children in this cohort had identified learning needs and many came into the care system at an older age. From the individual children's starting point, inspectors concluded that the ELAC Virtual School had worked with schools and done as much as was possible to achieve. The proportion of looked after children achieving five A*-C GCSEs not including English and mathematics is much better and only slightly below national rates.

56. Children's health needs are adequately addressed through a coordinated approach across a range of health providers. The vast majority of children and young people are registered with a local GP and have good access to a dedicated looked after children paediatrician who provides additional advice and guidance. However, progress to ensure that all children have timely health and dental checks, developmental checks and appropriate age related immunisations is too variable. While some of this is attributable to inaccurate recording, school nurses are currently not able to offer a service for young people aged 16–18 unless they are attending a state school or are in residential care. This had been identified as a concern by the authority and they have commissioned additional support to address this issue.
57. Children and young people are well supported to engage in leisure activities and those spoken to during this inspection reported an excellent range of opportunities available to them which reflected their interests. There is also targeted work to avoid looked after children becoming involved in offending. Performance data now show a reduction in the proportion of looked after children offending over the last four years and it is now below that of similar authorities.
58. The local authority is keen and pro-active in listening to children's views about the services they receive and takes action to improve services in response. There is a well-established and highly valued children in care council. Members of three looked after children's groups met by inspectors reported positively on the support received from their workers and the local authority and on being listened to.

The graded judgment for adoption performance is good

59. Adoption services are good with some outstanding examples of individual work. Adoption is considered at the earliest stage in case planning for children where a return to their family would be unsafe or would not satisfactorily meet their needs. This includes an appropriate use of concurrent and parallel planning. Following the findings of a self-commissioned Adoption Diagnostic in April 2013, North Yorkshire are now tracking from the point of referral children whose plan is likely to become one of adoption. This enables managers to start considering

the availability of placements that can best meet children's needs in a timely way and this is ensuring effective early action. All social workers have also been trained in permanency planning to enable them to understand and implement any needed changes in practice to better support children's long term future. There are also effective links between the commissioning and contracts team and operational services to ensure a timely identification of placement need at an early stage.

60. The average time between children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 564 days which is very good and below statistical neighbours and England averages at 643 and 647 days. This level of performance is achievable because of the positive work undertaken with the courts and Cafcass to improve the timeliness of care proceedings. According to the local authority's own data they are now within the government target of 26 weeks for the completion of care proceedings and this is good. The average time between North Yorkshire receiving court authority to place a child and the authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family is 154 days, which is 56 days quicker than the national performance. North Yorkshire is one of only 23 local authorities to show improvements on their three year performance against both these areas compared to 2008–11.
61. An improved early focus on adoption and other permanency options such as Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and Residence Orders (RO's) has been achieved through effective senior manager oversight at the placement and finding and matching panels. The quality and timeliness of decision making has improved because there are clearly defined, well understood processes being implemented to ensure detailed assessments of need are in place when first required.
62. North Yorkshire is fully engaged in family finding activities such as the use of Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium and BAAF, who organised an activity day which involved children and prospective adopters. Managers and staff are developing an innovative child and adopter led recruitment project to target recruitment for older and harder to place children. The project implementation has only recently been rolled out and therefore it is too early to evaluate effectiveness. A further adoption activity day is planned with consortia members for later in the year. Recently the Adoption Service was able to identify 16 adoptive placements out of a group of 23 harder to place children. North Yorkshire is effectively using streamlined approval processes for adopters, including fast tracking for people adopting for second and subsequent times. There is an improved focus on concurrent planning and fostering to adopt following the outcome of the Adoption Diagnostic, although this is in the early stages.
63. Good use of the Adoption Support Grant has led to an increase in the number of adopters from 38 in 2012–13 to 50 in 2013–14. An ambitious target of 70 has been set for 2014–15. The grant has also been used to fund additional social work posts, increase the capacity for family group conferences, and for

support workers in the Adoption Service and looked after children social work posts. This has contributed to an increase in the number of children adopted from 21 in 2012–13 to 35 children in 2013–14, which is a good performance. 61% of children wait less than 20 months from entering care to moving in with an adoptive family, which is better than comparable authorities.

64. Life appreciation days are carried out for older children and those with particularly complex backgrounds. This helps adopters to develop a richer understanding of children's histories and needs. Some children are waiting too long for life story work, although when completed it is of a high quality.
65. Matches are effectively scrutinised by an experienced adoption panel and agency decision maker (ADM). There is evidence of appropriate challenge by panel and the ADM, with focused consideration given to permanence in relation to the needs of individual children, including sibling groups. Assessments and matching arrangements are of good quality and this contributes to timely decision making for children. Disruptions to adoption placements are low and analysis of these is being further improved by the recent appointment of independent social workers to collate an overview of disruptions and lessons learnt.
66. The authority recognises that not all children need adoption. In spite of considerable financial pressures to reduce council expenditure 200 children are looked after under SGO's until the age of 18 years as well as 18 children in adoption placements.
67. Pre- and post-adoption support is of good quality and there are some examples of excellent support packages for individual children and adoptive families to prevent placements breaking down. This includes work with birth parents to support adoptive placements and the provision of specialist packages of respite and support care for children with complex needs. Adopters are positive about the quality of preparation, training and support. The Adoption Service facilitates support groups, drop-in sessions and teenage support groups. Four adoption Social Workers are trained in 'theraplay' and use this in both direct work with adopted children and in teaching parents how to strengthen their attachment with their children. Birth Families can access support during the adoption process and after adoption from the charity After Adoption Yorkshire. North Yorkshire County Council provides a comprehensive post-adoption letter box service managed by the Adoption Panels Advisor.
68. Access to CAMHS support pre- and post-adoption and in relation to improving support within schools had been identified by the local authority as an area needing further improvement and work is on-going to commission a new service.
69. North Yorkshire is one of 10 local authorities identified for the Adoption Support Fund pilot. The Adoption Service has already identified ten families for additional support.

The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers is good

70. Care leavers are well supported by the dedicated care leavers' teams and their personal advisors (PAs). One care leaver stated that 'my PA is fab and I would keep her as a personal friend if I could'. This reflected what inspectors heard in talking to young people throughout the inspection.
71. The authority has recently restructured the service into 'hubs' to better support young people from the of age 16 to 25. There are now a range of multi-agency services working together, including targeted youth support, dedicated housing workers, youth justice workers and accommodation providers such as Barnardos and Foundation.
72. Both academic and wider success is well celebrated throughout the authority and young people met by inspectors were justifiably proud of their achievements. A Young People's Council regularly meets to talk about issues around being looked after and leaving care. They also meet with senior managers to provide feedback about the experiences of children looked after. An annual celebration event attended by the lead member and senior managers from the authority celebrates the achievements of looked after children and care leavers and this is valued highly by them.
73. Thorough and detailed transition planning clearly identifies young people's needs, any potential risks and the level of support needed to help young people become independent adults. PAs employ good strategies to engage and consult young people. Good planning was evident in all of the cases seen by inspectors and PAs talked knowledgeably about young people. However, care leavers spoken to by inspectors said they did not always find the current pathway plan to be a useful tool to effectively plan for their future. 'A bit tedious' was how one care leaver described completing their pathway plan. In written plans key aspects are not always consistently completed.
74. Care leavers have been involved in reviewing the effectiveness of the service and feel that North Yorkshire listens to their views very well. They have been fully involved in developing the care leavers 'pledge' and a recent redesign of the pathway plan to ensure that in the future it will be more useful to them. Care leavers have a good understanding of their rights and what they are entitled to from the authority.
75. Health partners effectively support young people through regular routine health and dental checks and specialist health support through mental health services. Sufficient specialist services are available in relation to sexual health and other risk taking behaviour, for example the dangers of drugs and alcohol misuse when this is required. The NSPCC also provides additional and well-targeted help in relation to young peoples' emotional well-being. Care leavers currently do not have access to their health histories although work to address this has begun.

76. Good educational provision is in place for care leavers and the majority are attending local further education colleges, other education and training or university. Currently the authority is supporting 23 young people in higher education with a good package of independent advice and guidance, financial support and on-going pastoral care. In addition new council internship, work experience and a graduate apprenticeship schemes are being developed. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training is 12% and this is in line with the overall population of young people living in North Yorkshire.
77. Care leavers have access to a good range of accommodation that meets their individual needs. Of those living in the local area 51% manage their own tenancies supported by an effective 'pathways' project. The seven district councils prioritise care leavers to 'gold status' in their bid for social housing. Therefore, the majority of care leavers who apply in North Yorkshire are successful in being housed in their own tenancies. Of the current cohort of care leavers 37% (80) choose to live outside the local authority area. In the main they live a short distance from the local authority boundaries and in the main are supported well by the authority. Temporary bed and breakfast accommodation is not used by the authority and this is good.
78. The 'Staying Put' policy has resulted in young care leavers now having the security of remaining with their foster family post-18 and this is good. Since 2008, 110 care leavers have remained in their foster placements and care leavers told inspectors that being able to stay with their foster carers made all the difference to them in being able to access continuing education.
79. Social workers are proactive in supporting young people, including those who have a disability, to make sure they receive all their financial entitlements, for example educational bursaries, adult learning grants, disability living allowance, housing benefit and independent living grant. Better links with Job Centres are improving care leavers' access to their benefit entitlements.

Leadership, management and governance are good

80. Accountable and appropriate governance arrangements are in place between the Chief Executive, Lead Member, Director of Children's Services and the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board. Collective statutory responsibilities are met and effective corporate and aligned strategic planning is securing a shared vision and ambition for children, young people and their families.
81. There is good financial planning in place relating to the next five years which will help ensure the sustainability of services. As part of this there is a commitment to the protection of front line services and to the recruitment of additional staff to further improve the delivery.
82. North Yorkshire Children's Services has taken positive action to improve the quality of service delivery since 2010, which culminated in the transformation of services in March 2012. A change in culture has been led by the new Director of Children's Services and his leadership team, underpinned by a strong leadership pledge. This has facilitated a new focus on partnership working, a commitment to improving performance and the quality of services and the outcomes for children and young people.
83. Services have been restructured to strengthen practice and consistency across teams and areas, to further develop collaboration with services and agencies and to manage budgets to deliver efficiencies. There is good progress in a number of areas. For example, improved support for children on the edge of care, safe reduction of the numbers of children looked after and consistency of practice across North Yorkshire. Actions arising from inspections, including the child protection inspection in 2012, have been addressed by appropriately focused and monitored action planning.
84. The authority understands the needs of its local communities very well. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is currently being refreshed to incorporate a further range of information about children and young people and their families. This includes integrating their already good understanding about the prevalence of domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health across the county. The local authority is able to differentiate need and is providing a range of appropriately targeted services at a local level because of this good range of information.
85. A comprehensive sufficiency strategy is in place for the provision of placements for Looked After Children and this is being used effectively to plan future service delivery. There are also improved and aligned commissioning and procurement processes across children's services. For instance with Health partners the alignment between the healthy child programme and 0–19 preventative agenda in children's service has commenced. The contract for emotional mental health services is also being re-tendered to ensure service provision meets the needs across the county.

86. Partnerships are mature and are being further strengthened by coherent and joined up strategic planning. The Children's Trust has been retained and children and young people are a clear focus of the Health and Well-being Board. There are coherent strategies in place within the local authority and children's social care that set out clearly the vision for services for children, young people and families. This includes a clear strategic focus on enhancing prevention and this has been communicated effectively to the social care workforce. This aligns coherently with the Looked After Children strategy.
87. A survey conducted across all schools of the views of children and young people was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board recently. This is raising the profile of children's views in strategic decision making and contributing to securing shared priorities amongst partners.
88. There are effective relationships with Cafcass, the family courts and the local Family Justice Board. This has ensured that very good progress has been made in reducing delay for children and young people in care proceedings.
89. An ambitious, comprehensive and effective workforce strategy is in place that has secured a stable and permanent workforce. The vacancy rate is low at 7% and there is a low turnover of staff. There are no agency workers and 50% of the workforce are experienced social workers. There is a long term investment, both financially and professionally, in developing social workers' practice and career paths in line with the vision for children's social care. This includes very good support for newly qualified social workers and a range of programmes such as 'step up to social work' and 'grow your own' as well as responsive and targeted recruitment practice to ensure that the different locality needs are met.
90. Social workers have good access to a range of information, research and materials via web-based learning and resource sites. Learning is well promoted in children's services; for instance, Signs Of Safety and compulsory permanency and reflective supervision training. All of these have contributed to significant improvements in the services. The Signs Of Safety model is fully embedded in the Assessment and Impact teams and is being further embedded across all social work teams. This has led to an improved focus on children, young people and families and raised the quality of social work assessments and of direct work with families. The Permanency training has contributed to the consideration of adoption at the earliest opportunity and has supported the improvement in the numbers and timeliness of children being adopted. Other examples include serious case review evaluations cascaded to social workers via briefings. Research to inform assessments was seen by inspectors but this is not fully embedded.
91. Organisational learning is demonstrated through improved monitoring and evaluation in relation to complaints and placement disruptions. For instance placement disruptions are now being assessed by someone independent of the

service. An overview of this work is currently being evaluated to inform learning. Information from complaints has been used to good effect to improve the challenge provided by IROs and the timeliness of reports.

92. The introduction of Viewpoint, an interactive web-based tool for children, young people and families to share their views, is a positive step to embedding consistency in relation to learning from feedback. It is, however, too early in its development to see significant impact. Children and young people meet regularly with elected members through the Children's Council and they are making positive contributions to improving service delivery, for example in relation to the location of health assessments.
93. Performance information is rich, which facilitates responsive and timely action to understand and address any dips in performance. A broad suite of indicators is robustly and regularly monitored by the senior leadership team. A scorecard is currently being developed to further embed understanding of the key areas for improvement. Very good performance outcomes have been achieved and sustained across most areas but this is not the case in all indicators; for instance, attainment at education Key Stage 4 and in relation to health outcomes for looked after children. Children's service delivery plans and the performance management framework do not sufficiently highlight the key areas for improvement and it is not sufficiently clear how some of the performance issues identified during the inspection were being tackled.
94. Quality assurance, while thorough, focuses on whether something has occurred and in what timescale. Case file audits seen by inspectors were descriptive of processes. Currently the experiences of children and young people are not systematically evaluated as part of this framework.
95. Management oversight of social work practice is generally of a good quality. Managers have successfully driven improvement in a number of areas such as completion of case chronologies, ensuring child in need plans are consistently in place and improving the quality of assessments. However, some of the issues about front line practice, such as the lack of robust decision making prior to stepping down cases, had not been identified, and the high percentage of repeat child protection plans had not been fully scrutinised prior to being evaluated by inspectors.
96. Social work supervision is regular. Reflective Group supervision is now embedded in practice. Caseloads are manageable and range between 10 and 19 cases, though a delay in case closures in one team and recruitment delays in another has resulted in higher than average caseloads for a small number of social workers. This was addressed during the inspection by the authority and caseloads were reduced.
97. Members show a strong sense of corporate parenting responsibility with a clear understanding of the looked after children population through regular and detailed performance information briefings. There is purposeful engagement by

members with children, social workers, and foster carers. This includes an awareness of children placed out of area. Members alongside officers are looking at ways of improving participation of children, including those placed out of area, through the roll out of ipads and the use of shared websites for meetings. An example of excellent work was the visit by the Lead member and a colleague to the local Wetherby Young Offenders Institution where a care leaver had been placed as part of his sentence for a serious offence. The looked after children members group offers appropriate challenge and has been working on improving health assessment, the quality of personal education plans, the use of the pupil premium and work with the police in relation to looked after children with offending behaviours.

What the inspection judgements mean: the local authority

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

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

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

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

Section 2: The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

The effectiveness of the LSCB is good

Areas for improvement

98. Strengthen the links with the Domestic Abuse Board and increase the focus domestic abuse has in the NYSCB business plan in line with the level of local need.
99. Extend the current membership of the Board to include representatives from education to engage in strategic planning and decision making across the area.
100. Include an evaluation of private fostering arrangements in the annual NYSCB report. Formalise an agreed protocol for links and communication between key strategic Boards, in particular the Health and Well-Being Board.

Key strengths and weaknesses of the LSCB

101. The North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board (NYSCB) is a highly effective partnership, with a strong independent Chair and business manager providing a clear direction and effective challenge to ensure that the Board fulfils the requirements of legislation.
102. The independent Chair regularly communicates with the Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Lead Member to ensure that they are fully informed of the work of the Board and how this is influencing and improving safeguarding practice. The Lead Member has also been proactive in taking information to the scrutiny panel and providing challenge where necessary, for example over E- Safety and information regarding missing children.
103. The work of the Board is well supported through a good range of sub-groups, task groups and well-represented locality groups known as Children's Safeguarding and Strategy Groups. The Army Welfare Service is well represented, ensuring good links with Catterick Garrison.
104. The NYSCB policy officer provides a consistent link between the Children's Safeguarding and Strategy Groups (CSSG) and the main board. Although meeting the requirements in the guidance, the membership of the main strategic Board would be strengthened further by securing representation from education institutions.
105. Strong links with the Health and Well-Being Board and Children's Trust ensure children's interests are a priority across the Boards. Although arrangements are effective in practice they are not formalised through an agreed protocol. Links with the Domestic Abuse Board could be strengthened in view of the

acknowledged prevalence within the county and within referrals to children's services.

106. The Board is financially sound, with financial contributions and time commitments from partners. This enables the Board to deliver against the key strategic priorities of an effective business plan that is informed by data, training and learning from case reviews and file audits. This ensures that the Board knows the area very well and has an excellent knowledge of front line practice.
107. Partnership working is strong, which promotes effective multi-agency practice, and all agencies understand and meet their core responsibilities for promoting children and young people's safety, welfare and outcomes. This is evident at a strategic level, demonstrated by all professionals sharing responsibility for driving key business priorities through chairing and prioritising their roles within the NYSCB sub-groups. The agreed mechanisms for monitoring and understanding the effectiveness of local arrangements underpin the confidence of the Board and sub-groups in the quality of safeguarding.
108. The partnership, through the Board, has improved communication and generates well-disseminated information to share and promote improvements of front line practice through learning from audits, national policy developments and guidance. Serious case reviews are initiated and published in line with guidance. There had been no serious incidents requiring notifications to be made to Ofsted in the last twelve months up until April 2014 and there had been no serious case reviews (SCR) undertaken in North Yorkshire. However immediately following the inspection there was an appropriate notification of an incident and currently consideration is underway of whether to hold a SCR.
109. The Board and partners have developed clear guidance on thresholds and the Early Help Offer which is well embedded in practice and leads to children and young people receiving consistent responses and interventions in the majority of cases. Multi-agency audits review the application of thresholds at referral point and step-up and step-down points, test consistency and report findings to the Board for oversight.
110. The Learning and Improvement Framework, and particularly training, is a strength of the NYSCB. The Board learns from the auditing and reviews that are undertaken and that ultimately inform training. Conferences have been well received and have been attended by practitioners from across the partner agencies. The child sexual exploitation (CSE) conference is an example of the Board providing a quality learning event that professionals can see has made a direct difference to practice by raising awareness. This has included better screening of CSE concerns and an increase in referrals.
111. Two strategic groups, sub-groups of the NYSCB, oversee the work involved in identifying children and young people vulnerable to child sexual exploitation

(CSE) or missing from home, care and or education. The NYSCB monitors this area of work well and uses aggregate data to track trends and shape services.

112. NYSCB training is routinely evaluated and as a result improvements have been made to the accessibility of events across the county, including ensuring training events are linked to the days allocated for training to the police. Overall this has significantly increased agencies' attendance at NYSCB events from 57% to 83% currently. Training is well targeted to improve practice, informed by practitioners' learning needs based upon thematic and multi-agency practice audits and learning from serious case reviews. National research findings and new guidance are incorporated in addition to ensuring the needs of children with disabilities are fully represented in all training programmes.
113. Auditing is a well-embedded activity for the NYSCB, which includes regular Section 11 audits resulting in clear action plans to address weaknesses across services. Many examples, such as improving strategy meetings and pre-birth interventions, have made a measurable difference to practice, procedural and policy development and training. Policies and procedures are regularly improved and updated.
114. The performance quality assurance framework has been newly developed to consolidate the current and comprehensive safeguarding data received by the Board into one coherent framework. The first consolidated data set is to be provided to the Board in July 2014. This is to enhance the Board's current overview of key priorities, such as taking action to reduce children missing.
115. The NYSCB is a listening Board that takes account of the views of practitioners and young people to develop the Board further. An example of this has been the work young people have undertaken in reviewing the web-site to improve its appeal to young people. This includes links to videos and E-safety material to inform young people on their choices in risk-taking behaviours.
116. There is a good annual report and business plan that is informed by reports from required panels, sub-groups, task groups and children's social care. The report does not contain an evaluation of private fostering data although the Board receives an annual report regarding private fostering.
117. Shortly after the inspection, North Yorkshire notified Ofsted of the death of a child looked after. The LSCB is appropriately considering whether to hold a serious case review. This is a traumatic event for all concerned. It is too early to identify the precise details of the events and what, if any, learning needs to be taken forward for the future.

What the inspection judgements mean: the LSCB

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

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

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

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

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