



Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services Stockton-on-Tees

Inspection dates 13 to 24 September 2010

Reporting inspector Martin Ayres 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 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 over 50 children and young people receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members, the Chief Executives and executive board directors of the North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation NHS Trust, the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and NHS Stockton-on-Tees, and a range of community representatives;
 - Analysing and evaluating 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', 2006;
 - A review of 26 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, assessment and referral services undertaken in January 2010.

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. Stockton-on-Tees is a unitary authority located in the Tees Valley area of North East England. The borough is a mixture of urban centres, market towns and villages. It has a population of approximately 193,000 people of which nearly 48,000 are children and young people aged between 0 to 19 years. Some 2,500 children are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The overall population of the borough is increasing. There is a high level of economic diversity, with 15% of the population living within the top 20% of the most affluent areas nationally and 34% living in the 20% most deprived areas of England.
5. The Stockton Renaissance is the Local Strategic Partnership for the borough, which brings together a mix of thematic partnerships, area partnerships and regional organisations. The Children's Trust is one of the seven thematic partnerships within the Stockton Renaissance Partnership structure, and there are close links with the four locality based area partnerships. The Children's Trust comprises a strategic board, executive team and several groups working to the five Every Child Matters outcomes. The Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) operates within the Trust structure.
6. Local authority children's services are managed through the service grouping for Children, Education and Social Care (CESC), which brings together services for children's and adults' social care, education improvement, and complex and additional needs. The established delivery model for children's services is based on joint arrangements for commissioning and operations. The Integrated Service Area (ISA) arrangements implemented during 2008 have been the subject of a recent review in order to strengthen the management, oversight and accountability for services while retaining a focus on integrated, locality based services.
7. Arrangements for dealing with all contacts from the public regarding children's services have also been strengthened following recent reviews. This has led to an enhanced First Contact Service and the merging of the Duty and Domestic Violence Teams. First Contact and

the new Duty Team are now co-located in order to facilitate the smooth transition of work between the two services. Stockton-on-Tees is the lead authority for an Emergency Duty Team commissioned with the other councils in the Tees area. The council maintains four children's homes. Two of these are three-bed homes providing long term care, one is a six-bed home for short term, emergency or task centred accommodation, and one provides short break care and accommodation for the equivalent of six young people with additional needs. There are 11 designated children's centres in the borough. The Integrated Youth Service, which provides both universal and targeted youth support, comprises the Youth Offending Service and those services previously delivered through the Youth service and Connexions. The borough has 24 youth centres. There are currently 60 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, two academies, three special schools, one pupil referral unit, one sixth form college and a college of further education in the borough. At the time of the inspection there were 292 children and young people being looked after by the local authority, of whom 235 were in foster placements, 226 children and young people who were the subject of a child protection plans, and 1,268 children and young people assessed as being in need. Some 820 children and young people had a statement of special educational need.

8. The joint commissioning of services is carried out by the Commissioning Unit in Children, Education and Social Care, which is jointly funded by the council and NHS Stockton-on-Tees. The unit is responsible for all local authority and non-acute primary care trust (PCT) commissioning of services for children and young people. North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust provides acute hospital services, health visiting, speech and language, nursery and midwifery services. Policing is delivered through the command structure of Cleveland Police. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided by Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (adequate)

9. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is adequate. The unannounced inspection conducted in January 2010 found weaknesses in the staffing and organisation of front line services in children's social care, leading to two priority actions. The council had already identified these problems in November 2009 and as a result had started to implement an action plan. Since the unannounced inspection, the Duty and Domestic Violence Teams have amalgamated into one and there is now greater stability in staffing and management. Additionally, there have been improvements in police referral processes to ensure that domestic violence cases are suitably reported and prioritised. Referring agencies now consistently report that referrals are dealt with in a timely manner and that they receive feedback on actions to be taken. The overall quality of initial and core assessments is improving, although the level of analysis is variable. Management oversight and staffing of front line services are strengthened. The arrangements for joint investigation are appropriately considered through the use of strategy meetings and case conferences, and review processes are adequate.
10. The SLSCB has established clear thresholds for access to social care services, utilising a model which includes a range of interventions and levels. At the time of the unannounced inspection, this model was not being applied consistently across the partnership and the quality of practice was variable. While previously weak historical practice could still be identified in the cases examined, inspectors also noted improvements in the quality and effectiveness of practice since January 2010. Children and young people are suitably identified and protected. Assessments are completed and, as necessary, action is taken to escalate intervention in accordance with joint child protection procedures. Nevertheless, some variability in the quality of case recording and analysis in children's social care is still evident and senior managers recognise that this remains an area for further improvement.
11. Strategic management and leadership, including the role of elected members and the third sector, are good overall. The Children's Trust has set clear priorities for safeguarding, with clear lines of communication with other boards, groups and committees in the delivery of services. The SLSCB operates in accordance with the requirement of *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010* and has established a good record

across the partnership in respect of awareness-raising on all aspects of safeguarding and in joint staff development and training. Professional challenge within both the SLSCB and partner agencies is used to apply the learning from the serious case review instigated in the area in 2009; for example, in all identified cases of neglect, a medical assessment is now undertaken by paediatricians and the police management team reviews cases on a daily basis to risk manage cases to ensure referrals are appropriately handled. The SLSCB has been relatively slow to address fully the gaps in the comprehensive development and implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and in ensuring this plays an active part in the continuum of service provision to children who need additional services in the area. The SLSCB work plan includes actions in respect of CAF, and this aspect of development is now suitably prioritised.

12. Awareness of safeguarding across the partnership is widespread with good examples of effective working to promote the welfare of vulnerable children and young people. These include work in libraries in respect of e-safety, in leisure services and through the community safety partnership. Children and young people have indicated that they receive advice and support on keeping safe and have good awareness of what to do in the event of inappropriate behaviours or events. Schools, children's centres and all health settings maintain a clear focus on safeguarding and the responsibilities of staff in this regard. Schools in Stockton show commitment to promoting the well-being of their pupils and safe learning environments. School inspections have highlighted this commitment to safeguarding. There are effective systems to identify children and young people who frequently attend the accident and emergency service at North Tees Hospital or may be at additional risks because of parental issues such as ill mental health, domestic violence or substance misuse. There is good support in conjunction with local children's centres for young women who are pregnant. Inspections of regulated services, including children's homes, fostering, day care and aspects of children's centres provision, have identified effective processes for safeguarding. The four local authority children's homes are particularly strong, with three judged at inspection to be outstanding and one good. Westlands residential special school provision is outstanding. The pupil referral unit was judged as good in the most recent inspection.
13. Performance management arrangements are in place with routine reporting of performance against the national and local indicators to the SLSCB and Children's Trust. However, processes to ensure the consistent quality of practice are less well developed. Children and

young people are provided with guidance and support to make complaints, which are pursued rigorously and learning from complaints is used to help develop services. The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is recently fully established. Staff recruitment processes are adequate with appropriate attention given to compliance with key processes to ensure safe recruitment and retention practice. Independent Reviewing Officers are active in case planning and reviewing functions and they work hard to engage users in these processes. There is, however, increasing pressure on this service and current capacity is tight.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (adequate)

14. Capacity for improvement is adequate. The Children's Trust Board provides strong and visible leadership with clear priorities for safeguarding. There are good examples of partnership working leading to the provision of a range of effective services to children and families. There has however been a decline in the quality of provision in safeguarding services: from the excellent position reflected in the Annual Performance Assessment in 2007 to one where priority actions were identified in the unannounced inspection in January 2010. The work undertaken to address the priority actions from the unannounced inspection has had a positive impact on service delivery within children's social care, and there is now a drive to sustain the improvements made. The area has struggled to recruit social workers and some health practitioners to front line early intervention services, leading to significant reliance on agency practitioners and managers. This is being tackled within an adequate workforce development plan and there are signs that the staffing difficulties which reached a head in 2009 have been more stabilised.
15. The SLSCB is functioning at a satisfactory level and has achieved a good record in raising safeguarding awareness and in delivering good quality joint safeguarding training. Thus far, the Board is not yet providing the drive and thrust needed to ensure that there is full compliance and consistency in the use of CAF and in establishing coherent early intervention pathways. This has been an acknowledged and longstanding issue but the pace of resolution has been too slow. Arrangements to deliver a coherent range of early intervention services are not yet fully effective, although there are good examples of individual projects and joint working on some cases and the borough has very good and well regarded children's centre provision. The use of CAF is insufficiently embedded or owned by all partners as an important process; this is reducing opportunities for earlier forms of intervention

and joint working to meet the needs of children who do not reach the threshold for child protection.

16. Performance management systems are in place, but largely based on compliance to meet national performance indicators. The development of effective audit systems and tools to measure and monitor practice quality is less well refined, and this is currently inhibiting the capacity of both the Trust and SLSCB to jointly evaluate the impact of services and outcomes for children and families in a way that fully supports continuous improvement. The audit tool used by the authority to evaluate the cases selected for this inspection does not adequately evaluate the quality of practice or outcomes, and staff reported that this tool is used more to check the effectiveness of the electronic recording system.

Areas for improvement

17. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Within three months

- The Children's Trust and SLSCB should review the processes used by all partner agencies and bodies to audit the quality of practice to ensure there is a sharper focus on the quality of provision, including recording, analysis and the measurement of intermediate outcomes.
- Review the capacity of safeguarding named and designated health professionals across health partners to ensure that the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010* are fully met.

▪ Within six months

- Establish and implement a comprehensive framework for the delivery of the CAF, associated pathways for early intervention services and joint processes for monitoring the impact, effectiveness and quality of services.
- Review the team capacity of Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that there is compliance with statutory guidance (due to be implemented in April 2011).

Outcomes for children and young people

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 3 (adequate)

18. The effectiveness of services to ensure children and young people are safe is adequate. Referral rates have increased indicating higher awareness levels across the borough. Clear escalation processes are in place to identify cases where higher levels of intervention are needed. Where children are identified as being at risk of harm, prompt action is taken to investigate concerns in accordance with statutory requirements. Learning from the recent serious case review, both in terms of process and outcomes, has been taken forward through the SLSCB and has led to relevant changes in practice and training. Child protection assessment and planning systems for individual children and families are adequate and ensure that children and young people who are assessed as being at risk of harm, are suitably protected and monitored.
19. Awareness of safeguarding across the partnership is good and agencies singly and jointly prioritise this aspect of service. There is effective work within health to provide advice, guidance and support in respect of CAMHS, sexual health, substance misuse and topic health-related issues such as safe tanning. Steady and good progress is being made to reduce the teenage conception rate and there is targeted support for young women who are pregnant. Midwives provide pre-natal support and post-natal care up to 28 days after delivery, before transferring the case to the health visiting team. The Healthy Child Programme is delivered by multi-agency support services through corporate caseload management and there are plans to re-introduce the health visitor ante-natal visit. This supports the identification of families who are in greatest need and where additional support is required. Immunisation and vaccination rates are above the national and local targets and carried out by general practitioners, the school nursing service and a specialist Tees-wide team.
20. Schools have dedicated and trained staff in place to provide a general safeguarding focus, as well as more closely directed work in respect of children and young people considered to be most at risk. Strategies to tackle bullying, including cyber-bullying, are effective; children and young people have reported they feel this is being dealt with and that teachers take active steps to deal with persistent instances. Safeguarding aspects of regulated services are assessed as being generally good. There is a reducing trend in the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system. Schools, libraries and leisure services are active in promoting safeguarding and in developing

opportunities to discuss keeping safe strategies with children and young people.

21. There are effective systems to identify children who have child protection plans and those children who frequently attend the accident and emergency service at North Tees Hospital. Procedures are less effective, however, at the walk-in and urgent care centre. This is being actively pursued by the PCT and an action plan has been agreed to bring about the necessary changes. Communication in respect of unborn children where there are concerns about potential harm is appropriate and arrangements are established to assess risk. Good awareness exists across all health partners regarding the need to safeguard children where parental substance misuse or domestic violence is suspected. Adult mental health services routinely carry out a risk assessment to identify any children or young people who may need safeguarding. There is a dedicated general practitioner service which provides general medical support to the registered asylum-seeking population and take up is good and increasing. The child death overview panel is fully operational and ensuring good learning from individual child deaths.
22. Careful attention is given to service commissioning and contracting to ensure safeguarding and child safety are given suitable prominence. The SLSCB provides a range of well-regarded training on all aspects of safeguarding and attendance is extended to a wide range of professionals and bodies across the area. Arrangements to monitor adults who may pose a risk to vulnerable children and young people are in place with particularly good involvement and leadership from the Probation Service. Suitable attention is paid by partners to issues of hate-crime and hidden harm. Specific developments to identify and support victims of forced marriage are in place. Co-ordinated work takes place to support the victims of domestic violence and to monitor the welfare of children and young people caught up in such situations.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 2 (good)

23. The effectiveness of services to ensure children and young people feel safe is good. Inspectors were told by children and young people that all the agencies make concerted effort to identify potential risks and to ensure they know what to do if they feel unsafe. Although most of the children and young people could recount times when they have faced difficult situations such as bullying, drunkenness or rowdy behaviours in the streets and open spaces in the area, they also indicated that they personally felt safe and were being suitably protected. Many children and young people provided examples where they had received specific

help from professionals and partner agencies to respond to any concerns raised. The outcome of the survey conducted specifically for this inspection supports this view; the significant majority of children and young people participating in the survey indicated that they felt safe.

24. Action taken to promote child safety is effective, for example the response of the forced marriage worker to the specific needs of vulnerable children and the work of the prevention team in engaging with young people involved in potential criminal or anti-social activities. The youth service is very active in finding ways to enable children and young people to become involved in activities, giving them the confidence they need to cope with difficult family and peer situations. Peer mentors make a good contribution to supporting vulnerable children and young people at school and contributing to the anti-bullying campaign.
25. Children and young people are supported to attend relevant planning meetings and those seen during the inspection reported that they have opportunities to express their views and that these are taken into account. Attendance rates are high. Children and young people have access to complaints systems and, where children and young people have used the system it is reported to be responsive to the issues raised. A young person who responded to the Care4Me survey expressed worries about his care. This was actively pursued by the council and the young person concerned reported satisfaction with the way this was handled and the outcome. The recording of the views of young children is of variable quality, although there is evidence that considerable efforts are being made to see children during the assessment and planning processes.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

26. Service responsiveness in safeguarding, including complaints, is adequate. Thresholds for service access are clearly stated within a defined model of intervention levels but this is not consistently utilised at practice level leading to different interpretations of expectations. This is not adversely affecting the higher level referrals in respect of child protection and potential harm, which appear to be consistently understood. However, for the lower levels of referrals for children in need, there are examples where agencies have referred to First Contact but children's services have indicated that the threshold for immediate action has not been met. The absence of a coherent CAF strategy available across the whole partnership is inevitably reducing opportunities for local professionals and agencies to respond to lower level needs directly. This causes some agencies to escalate

unnecessarily referrals to the higher levels. The SLSCB is aware of this problem but has been slow to tackle the issue through corporate effort to embed CAF as a robust and useful process. Awareness among key partners about all aspects of safeguarding is good and the SLSCB has delivered effective training programmes to support this understanding.

27. Referral rates remain relatively high and have been increasing. This has added to the pressures on social work teams already affected by staffing difficulties and turnover. This was recognised by senior managers who took action to strengthen front line services before the unannounced inspection in January 2010. The steps taken within the area to strengthen First Contact and the Referral and Assessment team have substantially responded to the priority actions from the unannounced inspection and led to greater team stability and improved management oversight and capacity. The service is now effective in receiving referrals, in obtaining additional information to inform decision-making, and in taking prompt action to investigate through the restructured referral and assessment team. All decisions from First Contact are appropriately signed off by the qualified team manager. However, the quality of referrals and provision of support information from partner agencies is variable and in some cases, there is a lack of clarity about the actions that social care staff are expected to take. Referring agencies and professionals report they receive both oral and written feedback on referrals and how these are being processed.
28. Joint protocols are in place in respect of domestic violence, which is a significant feature in the contacts and referrals received. The police use the same referral process and documentation across the four local authorities covered by the Cleveland police. The emergency duty team is well established and based in the area. Four other local authorities commission services from this team and provide staffing and resources to support the function. The team is well managed by an experienced manager who, alongside a core team and sessional staff, has a good knowledge of the area and respective child protection procedures and processes. Communication between day staff in children's social care, the police and out-of-hours services is generally good.
29. The quality of current initial and core assessments is now adequate overall and in a few new cases, is good. This is an improvement on the quality of historical cases which exhibited variable and in some instances inadequate practice. The timeliness of assessments and responsiveness to referrals are generally good and in line with or above similar areas. Although the quality of assessments is improving overall, some assessments lack detailed needs analysis and planning objectives are defined in too broad terms. This inhibits the capacity to measure the impact of plans and how families fully understand what they need to do to reduce levels of professional concern. Agreements are not always written in a way that supports partnership working within a fair contract

of understanding. Partnership working and communication are developing, and there are some good examples of impact, for example the use of a specialist health worker to respond to the needs of asylum-seeking children and the funding by the PCT of a designated forced marriage worker who is involved in providing awareness training across agencies. The police have actively pursued enquiries and worked closely with authorities in Pakistan to help protect young women who are, or might be, exploited. Good assessments for all referred cases of neglect are being routinely undertaken by suitably trained paediatricians. From October 2010 funding has been secured to ensure all children subject to a child protection plan on the grounds of neglect are subject to a full paediatric assessment. The commitment of health services to safeguarding is good overall, including the provision of accessible CAMHS, health promotion services, and services to support vulnerable children, young people and their families.

30. Case planning, reviews and recording are adequate. While good examples of effective direct work with older children and young people is evident, this is less obvious in respect of younger children. Case records demonstrate that children are appropriately seen alone as part of assessments and their views are consistently recorded in case records in a way that can be usefully used in planning. The recent establishment of a specific and discrete LADO post has been a useful addition to safeguarding arrangements but the impact is yet to be fully realised. Effective complaints systems are available to children and young people within a culture that takes complaints seriously and seeks resolution. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are active in their role and seek to ensure that the views of children and young people are heard in planning meetings. The experienced team of IROs covers both child protection conferences and reviews of looked after children which are usually undertaken within statutory timescales. The IROs provide a backstop to practice, appropriately referring cases back for more work within teams where this is required. The team remains under considerable pressure given the high number of child protection conferences and reviews, and looked after children reviews each IRO conducts in a year.
31. Supervision of cases by line managers takes place at regular intervals but recording of supervision does not always demonstrate challenge or that intermediate outcomes are fully considered in order to assist in achieving longer term objectives. Case records overall are improving although staff and managers have mixed views about the recording system in use; some state that they find the electronic system difficult to use to track the case history, while others feel they are adept at navigating the system. Although the quality of recording is adequate overall, there is scope to rationalise records and to make them more

child centred in terms of objectives, measurable outcomes and clearer contingency planning.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (adequate)

32. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are adequate. The Stockton Renaissance structure for service delivery, which encompasses a wide range of thematic partnerships pertinent to safeguarding, provides clear co-ordinated strategic direction and is an outstanding model for planning and service delivery. Partners within this structure provide effective leadership to ensure safeguarding is maintained as a priority and is seen as an important topic within the range of thematic groups, area partnerships and local community groups.
33. Ambition and prioritisation are good. The Children's Trust provides good leadership on all children's services matters including safeguarding and the ambitious safeguarding priorities of the Children's and Young People's Plan are regularly reviewed to evaluate the impact of joint work. The SLSCB has served to raise awareness across the partnership on all aspects of safeguarding and has a solid record for the delivery of safeguarding training. Although the SLSCB is operating in accordance with the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010*, the Board recognises that it needs to adopt a more corporate and dynamic approach to ensure that issues are resolved more quickly, for example the delivery of CAF. Nevertheless, inspectors found good examples where the SLSCB provides effective leadership and appropriately holds others to account for the quality of safeguarding services.
34. Elected members demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding and are active in the range of committees, groups and boards. The lead member for children's services and Director of Children's Services has an effective working relationship and ensure that their statutory duties are being fully met. The Chief Executives of the NHS organisations meet regularly with the Director of Children's Services. Schools, children's centres and regulated services demonstrate a good commitment to safeguarding and this has been confirmed through inspections. Representation from all health NHS trusts on the Children Trust Board and the SLSCB is good. Safeguarding is a key indicator within the Children's Trust Board's quality assurance, reporting and monitoring processes. There is a clear link between the Children and Young People's Plan, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the delivery of services inspected. The substance misuse strategy for children and young people has recently been revised to incorporate increased emphasis on the abuse of alcohol by young people following evaluation of the previous service and identifying unmet need. The third sector plays an influential role within the partnership and is active in the

delivery of services in the area, including directly commissioned services. The co-ordination of third sector activity through an overarching organisation, Catalyst, is good and forward looking. Individual service plans and objectives are explicit in terms of the priority given to safeguarding.

35. The partnership has established important priorities in respect of domestic violence, hidden harm and substance misuse and there are good examples of service impact to reduce risk. These include reductions in teenage conception rates and in youth offending, and improved access to CAMHS. Problems associated with the delivery of front line services in the context of increasing referral rates and staffing shortages have been openly tackled, leading to service improvement. The partnership is open to the engagement of service users in planning processes and the Renaissance model is ensuring appropriate representation by minority groups. Safeguarding across health services is supported by a team of designated and named professionals who operate across commissioning and provider NHS organisations. The statutory requirements in accordance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010* are met in terms of named and designated doctor and nurse roles. However, the increasing number of children and young people identified as being in need is having impact on the ability of some health professionals to deliver a comprehensive service, such as supervision to family health workers who are working with the majority of these cases, and the timely recording of initial health assessments.
36. Performance management is adequate. Good systems are in place to monitor performance against national indicators and targets, with open reporting arrangements to the various boards and committees. Quality assurance processes are only adequately developed in children's social care, although there are some good individual examples in health services and third sector organisations. Corporately, quality assurance systems within the Trust and SLSCB are under developed, and current audit models do not provide a sufficiently clear focus on the quality of work and analysis. The partnership is making comparatively good progress against key safeguarding indicators including assessment timeliness, re-referral rates and the percentage of children who are and remain the subjects of child protection plans, all of which are in line with national or comparator averages.
37. Partnership working in respect of workforce development is adequate. Appropriate steps are taken to formulate strategies for staff recruitment and retention in an area where there is a significant level of competition for suitably trained and experienced staff in all provider services in the Tees area. Training programmes are effective and staff across the partnership seen during this inspection spoke highly of the support and training they receive. All safeguarding cases are suitably allocated,

although capacity is tight in some areas of joint service and there have been challenges in terms of ensuring that the workforce in front line children's services is able to meet the rigours and demands of incoming work. There are very few vacancies within health visiting and school nursing services due to a recent successful recruitment campaign. These services are now stabilised and the amalgamation of teams in social care is having a positive impact on the quality of work. The NHS organisations inspected had all completed a training needs analysis and staff are receiving appropriate training at the identified level. A Tees-wide health workers supervision policy has recently been adopted across the area and arrangements are being finalised to ensure full compliance. Processes to ensure the safe recruitment of staff in all partner organisations are embedded and comply with statutory requirements and national guidance.

38. User engagement is adequate with some good features. There is a dedicated general practitioner practice which provides general medical services to the registered asylum-seeking population. This service is supported by a dedicated team of healthcare professionals who provide healthcare, advice and referrals to other statutory and non statutory services where appropriate. The partnership has created a wide range of opportunities for service users to become engaged in planning, at both strategic and individual case levels. Children and young people state that, in the main, their views are sought and they feel people listen to them. There is good user engagement across all NHS organisations and health initiatives, for example a DVD has been produced by young men to effectively engage other young men about the use of contraception and the impact of becoming a father. Children's centres use a 'listening tree' to obtain the views of their younger children and have introduced a play train in the reception area in response to feedback. The youth service provides outstanding opportunities for user engagement and is supporting a range of initiatives including young ambassadors and young inspectors who have received specific training in this task. The select committee undertook a major review of the youth service, which entailed the engagement of a wide range of service users and visits to all the youth facilities in the area.
39. Partnership working is adequate overall. The child death overview panel, which is Tees-wide, has good multi-agency involvement and is appropriately funded by partners. The panel has an independent chair and is supported by a designated doctor and nurse with dedicated administrative support. The panel has published its annual report and is preparing findings and recommendations to improve the safety and care of children and young people in the area. Staff across health services, schools and third sector organisations know how to make referrals for targeted support for vulnerable families, including services to reduce domestic violence, for young people who are pregnant, and direct referrals into CAMHS at tiers two and three and, where necessary, into

First Contact. However, in some instances earlier forms of intervention could have been organised through the use of CAF. Work to deliver a range of assessment and interventions to promote children and young people's emotional health and well-being is good. There is a well established specialist tier three CAMHS for both looked after children and children with complex care needs. There is a tier 2/3 service provided as part of a pilot targeted mental health service in schools and early indications are that this is meeting the needs of children and young people at a much earlier stage. Team around the child approaches, including CAF, are evident but this is often as the result of local interest and commitment rather than part of a corporate and holistic strategy. The housing organisations have been forward-thinking in respect of homelessness and there is particularly good partnership working between the Probation service and Harbour (a Third Sector organisation supporting women who have been subjected to violence) in the delivery of services to vulnerable women and the victims of domestic violence. The police, in conjunction with other partners, have undertaken effective work in respect of forced marriage and in supporting vulnerable asylum-seeking young people. The work of the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is good overall with a strong commitment to ensuring risk is effectively evaluated. However, the demand for such assessments is increasing and capacity issues are beginning to be raised.

40. The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate with some good features. The area's diversity and equality strategy, policy and procedures are implemented effectively and has achieved level 3 of the equality standard for local government following a peer assessment by the Improvement and Development Agency. Renaissance has established overarching groups to ensure appropriate minority and faith group representation. A priority within the Children and Young People's Plan is to raise achievement for all children and, in particular, for vulnerable and hard to reach groups. There is some variable practice across the partnership in prioritising and promoting equality and diversity in all provision and there is insufficient reflection of the growing minority ethnic population in the workforce. Targets are set to recruit from minority ethnic groups but have yet to be achieved. Case records seen in the course of this inspection did not routinely record identity and ethnicity. However, there is evidence that practitioners in all the agencies take into account these features in their assessments and service delivery.
41. Senior managers have a good knowledge of the diversity profile of the area, and use data effectively to target directly the most vulnerable families. Good collaborative work between faith groups, the local authority and the voluntary and community sectors meets the needs of the minority ethnic population and vulnerable groups within the

borough. Specialist provision is offered for specific groups to make services more accessible to them, often with tailored programmes. Effective action is taken to tackle inequalities in outcomes for children and young people and the partnership produces an extensive range of data to monitor outcomes of different groups of children and young people. Good progress has been made in the last three years to improve the educational outcomes for Pakistani young people in response to the priorities set in the Children and Young People's Plan. Young people with diverse needs, such as disabilities and belonging to minority ethnic communities, report that their individual needs are met and that they are treated with respect. Translators are available as necessary to enable service users from minority groups to access services.

42. Vulnerable children and families receive good support through parent support advisors attached to schools. Their brokerage role is very effective in enabling families to access funds to support inclusion in school and community activities. The library service responds very well to the needs of vulnerable children and families, for example provision for the Gypsy and Traveller community to access library resources, including story-telling sessions for younger children and on-line theory driving training for older teenagers. Children's heritage and cultures are valued. For example in faith schools, good initiatives have enabled young people from all faiths to make a contribution to the school community. Services have been developed within children's centres to meet the needs of minority communities, with some good examples of effective work with Chinese and Polish communities.
43. Value for money is good. There are good examples of effective and joint commissioning of services and added value through contracts with a wide range of third sector organisations. Systems are well managed to review costs and to make informed decisions on the quality of services and whether objectives are being met and represent good value for money. Processes are in place to review contracts regularly although some smaller third sector organisations commented they would prefer three year rolling contracts as opposed to annual contracts. There are also good examples of joint working with neighbouring local authorities and health partners in order to achieve a scale of operations to achieve best value. Benchmarking and agreements on agency staff recruitment costs and emergency duty arrangements are good examples of cooperation in the region. Scrutiny arrangements are good and have had an impact on in developing services and achieving cost effectiveness.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (good)

44. The effectiveness of services for looked after children and care leavers is good. Placement stability, health support, educational outcomes and arrangements to keep looked after children and young people safe are all good. Joint working to enable looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution is outstanding. The impact of services to help young people to leave care and enter further education, employment and training is good and demonstrating an improving trend. Joint working is given a high priority within service plans and by the Children's Trust to ensure services remain focused on needs and securing continuous improvement. Compliance with statutory requirements is good, including assessment, planning, review, and social worker visiting. There are good examples of joint work to secure improved health care, promote education and attainment, facilitate access to leisure and cultural opportunities, and to reduce offending rates and promote positive contribution and economic well-being. Considerable effort is being made to secure a suitable range of placement options for looked after children with a good balance of foster care, in-house residential care and well monitored external placements; however the range of in-house fostering resources is insufficiently extensive. Inspections of all the regulated services have led to overall judgements of good or outstanding.
45. Elected members show good commitment to corporate parenting and act as local champions for looked after children and young people. Success is celebrated and looked after children and young people are encouraged to participate in planning processes. The youth service is active in promoting the welfare of looked after children and supports a range of work including the development of a young inspector scheme and other specific groups. Health support for looked after children and young people is good; assessments are comprehensive and include the individual's emotional health and well-being. The initial health assessments are completed by the named clinical lead for looked after children or a paediatrician. Health visitors, school nurses or the health advisor for vulnerable children and young people complete health reviews and offer a choice of venue where possible. Looked after children and young people have good access to dedicated CAMHS support which is highly regarded by the children and young people. The SSCB provides both general and focused safeguarding attention to

looked after children and young people which is reflected in policies, procedures and staff training. Looked after children make good progress in their education, are supported at school, and those with special educational needs achieve well relative to their peers.

46. Trends measured against national performance indicators are generally good and improving, and these indicators are closely monitored and scrutinised at a strategic level. Short and long term placement stability, attendance of looked after children and young people in their reviews, and offending and re-offending rates are all good. However, quality assurance systems, including local case auditing, are less well developed. IROs undertake their responsibilities well, but their capacity is stretched and results in some opportunities being lost to fully engage and help prepare children and young people before their review meetings. Although there is a permanency policy in use in the borough and current planning for permanent placements is at least adequate, it is in need of updating in order to establish clearer pathways and performance measures which are owned across the partnership.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (good)

47. The capacity to improve services to looked after children, young people and care leavers is good. The partnership is working from a firm foundation of success in achieving good outcomes for a large proportion of children and young people. The Children and Young People's Plan establishes a clear priority for services to looked after children and young people and there is a good analysis of need leading to explicit priorities which are being routinely reviewed at Trust level. The most significant areas for improvement are already understood by the partnership and work is in hand in most aspects to tighten relevant systems and to continue to build capacity. There is a good range of preventative services to support children, young people and their families on the cusp of care, although there is still scope to develop team around the child approaches to ensure they are more consistently applied across the area. Performance management systems are in place but these are not sufficiently comprehensive in developing and measuring local targets and quality of provision. Case files examined by inspectors show good and improving practice in assessment and care planning, although in some historical cases there is evidence of planning drift. Close examination of the work of the specialist social work team shows current practice is of a good standard.
48. Elected members and senior managers in all partner agencies demonstrate commitment to meeting the needs of looked after children

and young people and continue to ensure that there are resources available to meet the fluctuating demands of this population. The looked after children workforce is stable and there is an effective workload monitoring system in place for the allocation of cases within the social work service. A good range of training and post-qualification opportunities is in place to ensure a highly skilled workforce. The workforce does not currently fully reflect the ethnic diversity of local communities, although targets have been set to achieve this. The majority of looked after children and young people and their parents and carers expressed satisfaction in the support that they receive from joint services. Systems to ensure value for money, including efficiency reviews of services, are good and based on a range of relevant evidence, including regional bench-marking. The track record of service improvement for looked after children and young people is good.

Areas for improvement

49. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in Stockton-on-Tees, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately

- Ensure that ethnicity and identity is fully recorded in case and supervision records, and that all staff are able to demonstrate how these matters are being taken into account in assessments and planning.

Within three months

- Revise the draft status of the corporate parenting strategy to ensure this is now fully up to date and is being fully implemented.
- Review strategies for the recruitment of foster carers for looked after young people and fully implement actions to extend the range of opportunities to recruit new carers to the service in order to ensure there is greater placement choice.
- Ensure that risk assessments relating to looked after children and young people placed in accommodation appropriately consider the risks that may be posed to other children and young people in the same placement.

Within six months

- Evaluate the impact of the joint workforce strategy to ensure that targets to recruit from minority ethnic groups are sufficiently challenging and are being met.
- Enhance the permanency policy to ensure there is greater clarity on the core values and ensure that these are fully understood across the partnership in respect of planning priorities and actions.

Outcomes for children and young people

50. Services to promote the health of looked after children and outcomes are good. Initial health assessments are timely and comprehensive and incorporate emotional health and well-being. The engagement of health professionals to assess the ongoing health needs of looked after children and young people is appropriately targeted and includes the named clinical lead or paediatrician. Health visitors, school nurses or the health advisor for vulnerable children and young people complete effective health reviews and ensure children and young people are offered suitable venues for their reviews. Access to CAMHS for children, young people and their carers is good and the dedicated support provided is well regarded by the young people. This service is also available on a self-referral basis up to the age of 18 years. A range of flexible health services is provided to support foster carers and residential homes and is suitably tailored around the needs of the young people. General health advice and support are available to looked after children, young people and care leavers on important issues such as sexual health, smoking cessation and healthy eating. All looked after children and young people are registered with a NHS dentist and receive regular check-ups. There is a written record of those young people who opt out of their regular dental check and/or health review.

51. Children and young people who are looked after and care leavers benefit from good quality safeguarding arrangements. The SSCB and the Children's Trust place a high priority on meeting the needs of looked after children and young people to ensure they remain safe. Arrangements to commission services routinely include provision to safeguard and contracts are closely monitored for this aspect of service. Inspections of regulated services where looked after children and young people are accommodated have been judged at inspection as good at safeguarding children and young people. Short and long term placement stability is comparatively good and a high proportion of looked after children and young people are enabled to contribute to their individual care plans and reviews. Clear complaints systems are available to looked after children and young people and action to pursue complaints is prompt. As necessary, children and young people are provided with advocates to enable them to express any concerns they might have. Robust systems are in place to track and follow up children and young

people who are missing from care. All looked after children and young people surveyed as part of this inspection stated they felt very safe. Local need is met by stable and good quality foster care provision, although capacity remains stretched at times. Foster carers are provided with high levels of supervision and support which ensure the quality of the provision. The partnership is committed to, and offers, a comprehensive service to looked after children and young people, to ensure that they remain safe. There is a need to strengthen some risk assessment processes: assessments relating to looked after children and young people placed in accommodation must fully evaluate the possible risks to other children and young people in the same placement.

52. The impact of services in enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good and their provision in schools is prioritised. Designated teachers and staff in schools very effectively support other staff in developing their knowledge and skills in working with this group. Schools are inclusive and carers' involvement in school is actively encouraged. The establishment of a virtual school has had a significant impact on raising the profile of looked after children and young people and is providing a clear steer to headteachers and designated staff in focusing on their needs and supporting their continued progress. Educational support for looked after children and young people placed out of the area is also good. Highly effective multi-agency work enables children and young people to remain in mainstream education and on the school roll. Flexible timetables are arranged to offer a dual school experience or short period of alternative education to support looked after children and young people in re-integrating into their mainstream school and to enable stability of educational provision. In contrast, the quality of personal and individual education plans is variable. Although many are clearly written, up-to-date and contain achievable and measurable targets for children and young people, some do not have sufficient impact in improving the educational outcomes for looked after children or provide clarity on what is required to achieve this. The content of personal education plans and individual education plans is quality assured by the virtual headteacher and her team, who have identified some deficiencies in personal education plan formats. Improvements are planned to ensure their relevance and value, with a view to teachers holding responsibility for their completion.
53. Good strategies and tracking systems to monitor educational progress are in place and are well managed. Looked after children and young people progress well and are supported effectively at school. The achievement of looked after children is good. At the end of Key Stage 4,

41% of looked after children achieved 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C, which, while below the standards achieved by all children and young people, is above that of statistical neighbours and national averages for all looked after children. Looked after children make satisfactory progress relative to their peers at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and those with special educational needs achieve well relative to their peers. The numbers of looked after children and young people with statements of special educational needs during 2008/09 steadily decreased and was below that of the statistical neighbours group and the national average. At post-16, looked after young people make a good start to further education or training, but do not always remain in education or training beyond age 17.

54. Attendance is closely monitored and the local authority has made good progress in improving the attendance levels of looked after children. Intervention is effective in enabling children and young people to remain in learning and a wide range of provision is available including alternative education. Vocational training and one-to-one tuition are also provided to enable looked after children and young people to remain in education. The school's curriculum has been broadened and is being further developed to ensure that the interest of looked after children is captured and fostered. At post-16 and for alternative education at Key Stage 4 the curriculum is particularly well matched to the needs and interests of young people.
55. Looked after children have good access to a range of activities. Partnerships with the voluntary and independent sectors are particularly effective. The leisure card provided by Tees Active Ltd enables looked after children to access leisure services free of charge. The take up of leisure activities by looked after children and young people is good and is being appropriately monitored. Trips, outings and events which looked after children particularly enjoy are organised to encourage socialisation and support between children. Culture and leisure services are well engaged in the overall drive to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people and to enable them to enjoy their leisure time in productive ways.
56. Opportunities and outcomes for looked after children in making a positive contribution are outstanding. Care leavers make a significant contribution to national debates on the quality of support to post-16 care leavers. Good initiatives have been developed to enable children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to comment on the value and effectiveness of their experience of services. The support they receive improves their social and emotional well-being, including at key transition points. The majority of children interviewed

said that they had a good range of hobbies and interests which they enjoyed. Younger looked after children are particularly well supported and encouraged by their carers and social workers to participate in local events such as the Stockton parade. Particularly good use is made by all carers of community resources for children, for example church groups, karate lessons and the Guiding movement. The Tees-Active leisure card is valued by young people and where transport is an issue to access services and activities, taxis are provided by the local authority. Young people are very involved in community-based projects and become volunteers and peer mentors. Highly effective sex and relationship work in schools and youth settings is having a positive impact on young people's understanding of risk. The Risk website provides particularly good information for young people on maintaining emotional well-being and promoting the maintenance of sexual health. There has been significant reduction in teenage pregnancy rates over the past three years; within this the rate for looked after young women is very low.

57. Looked after children and young people are regularly and effectively involved in making decisions about their own lives. There is active engagement with children and young people to support them in expressing their views or concerns and ensuring appropriate action is taken. The advocacy service is good and enables children and young people to use the complaints procedures well. It offers independent people and independent officers for the investigation of stage two complaints. Direct work and consultation with younger children are completed on a one-to-one basis to ensure their voice is heard. The IROs spend time with children and young people before their reviews to seek their views in a non-threatening environment, although their capacity in this regard is too often stretched. IROs structure the review to suit the wishes of the children and young people as much as is possible.
58. The council's participation, involvement and consultation strategy aims to build the capacity of the Children's Trust staff to involve children and young people in their work and in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, and also to influence policy development, practice and promotion. Looked after children and care leavers are involved in quality assurance, training and evaluation of services and activities. Their contributions have led to sustained improvements in service provision, for example the work of young people involved in making a DVD informing other young people and agencies about the services they receive. Looked after young people attending the pupil referral unit routinely evaluate the quality of their services, and the school council which meets every fortnight has made suggestions to improve facilities which have been implemented. Looked after young people attending

mainstream education and those who become peer mentors make a good contribution to debates about supporting other vulnerable children and young people and contribute to the development of policies and procedures very well. The youth participation worker makes a significant contribution to supporting young people in participation activities and identifying where their impact can be best made, for example through the 'young inspectors project' and 'Youth Viewpoint News'. The views of young people have been particularly influential in shaping council members' views about the future of youth activity and provision. The multi-agency action to prevent looked after children and care leavers offending and/or re-offending is very effectively leading to improved outcomes and rates continuing to fall to a good comparative level. Police and children's social care have worked together to develop and implement a restorative justice approach which has led to a reduction in looked after children and young people offending and closer partnership working arrangements. First time entrants into the criminal justice system have reduced.

59. Outcomes for looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being are good. The performance gap between looked after children and the national average for all pupils post-16 is closing. The roles of Connexions personal advisors, youth workers, mentors and the youth offending service workers are clear and supportive. They very effectively focus on targeted groups of vulnerable young people including those who are looked after. Cooperation between professionals is good and links are strong, although not always formalised. Preventative work with young people at risk of disengagement with education and training is effective and the 'not known' figure is low. The 'not in education, employment or training' rate has increased slightly over the past year, but reflects the current economic downturn and fewer work and training opportunities.
60. Care leavers receive good support to access good quality provision that enables them to continue their education or training post-16. Post 16 care leavers receive good information, advice, support and guidance. Connexions personal advisors are helpful in exploring the options available to them. Links with mainstream education and external providers are good and provision is well matched to young people's needs. Most young people are following accredited programmes tailored to their abilities and interests. Transition plans for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receiving services are thorough, timely and regularly updated. Connexions personal advisors work closely with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from age 14, supporting the preparation of transition and pathway plans. Good

productive relationships between parents, carers and school staff support transition well. Parents and carers are able to explore alternative opportunities to special school sixth forms for their young people post-16. There is a good, clear multi-agency approach to transition planning at all stages, for example early years to primary education, then to secondary and into post-16 provision and adult services. Recent developments, such as a new guidance and information pack, aim to improve the transition from children's to adult services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Young people have had significant input in shaping this guidance. Clearer pictorial prompts and clues to text are part of the guidance, together with a stronger focus on young people's ownership of the process and their contribution to recording their planned outcomes.

61. Care leavers have high aspirations and a good proportion are making good progress overall in further and higher education. Access to further or higher education for care leavers is good. A range of initiatives to support and encourage care leavers to participate in education beyond age 16 has been very effective. Most care leavers take advantage of post-16 opportunities and are aware of the local authority's support for them to participate. Care leavers understand the progression routes available to them in relation to the qualifications and work experience in which they participate. Care leavers know what support is available for them. The number of care leavers, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are in education, employment or training is high at 64% in comparison to the national average for care leavers of 50%. The number of care leavers in the 'not known' category, at nil, is particularly good compared to the national average of 22%. Care leavers make a good contribution to their pathway plan reviews are positive about the plans made to support their transition to adulthood. The transition from secondary education to further learning at age 16 for all care leavers, including young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is well managed. Transition arrangements when moving between local authorities are satisfactory, although different approaches and expectations can cause confusion for staff providing mainstream services.
62. The majority of care leavers have access to good accommodation which meets most of their needs. Temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, is used only in an emergency for short periods. Stockton provides good advice to care leavers in managing their finances and, where additional support is required, it is well matched to need. Care leavers are positive about their experiences of this transition, although worried about their futures. Leaving care staff are supportive and helpful. Care leavers are positive about the support from the leaving care team and understand the need for a balance between support and the desire to break the ties to social care professionals.

The quality of provision

Grade 3 (adequate)

63. Service responsiveness is adequate. A range of effective preventative services are in place for children and young people on the cusp of care, including effective work within children's centres and the home visiting service. However, the patchy implementation of common processes across the partnership, chiefly the CAF, creates inconsistencies in the reach and overarching impact of these services. Partners contribute well to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. The multi-agency Looked After Children Partnership (MALAP), which includes cross-party elected member representation and young people, takes seriously its role as a corporate parent in ensuring that outcomes for children are maximised. The governing body for the virtual school with the virtual headteacher reporting directly on performance ensures achievement is effectively monitored and emerging trends are addressed.
64. A corporate parenting strategy for the period 2010 – 2013 has been developed and is being implemented. However, the status is still in draft form. There is a permanency policy in place dated 2007, but social workers and managers have indicated that implementation and understanding of it are inconsistent and there is a lack of evaluation of its effectiveness. All looked after children, young people and care leavers are allocated to a suitably qualified social worker and personal advisers but, as a result of staff shortages and changes in the structure of social work teams, some children and young people have experienced too frequent changes in workers. Appropriate decisions are taken to promote the safeguarding of looked after children and young people, including ensuring placement options meet high standards. All looked after children and young people are made aware of the council's complaints policy using age appropriate materials as soon as they become looked after. An independent advocacy service has been commissioned to support children and young people who wish to make a complaint. However, a large majority of looked after children are not aware of this service. Despite this, those who pursue a complaint are taken seriously and are dealt with fairly. The recent appointment of a specific LADO has improved allegations management and the protection of children.
65. The quality of regulated care provision is at least good in all cases. While the authority has been slow to introduce the systematic use of special guardianship and kinship care, inspectors saw some evidence of skilled work in using the full range of permanency options to meet the complex needs of large sibling groups. The quality of assessment and direct work with children is adequate. However, the quality of assessments is variable, with many failing to show sufficient analysis of the risk and protective factors in the child's life. Management oversight is evident, but this is not always sufficiently rigorous to ensure that

there is a comprehensive understanding of the needs of the child and potential risks to their safety. The views of children and their parents are elicited as part of the assessment process in the majority of cases, but it is not always clear how this impacts on case planning. There is some evidence of direct work with children and young people, particularly in the provision of family support, but this is not consistent. Foster carers make good use of universal provision for the children in their care to ensure that they are integrated into their local communities.

66. A small number of care leavers interviewed reported difficulty in contacting their social workers to enable them to resolve problems in their lives. An independent visiting scheme has been commissioned, but this is currently not being used to full capacity. Imaginative participation work is undertaken to allow young people to make an impact in the decision and policy making processes of the council. Short and long term stability of placements is in line with statistical neighbours and shows a steady trend of improvement, but levels of adoption are variable, although numbers are low. A comprehensive range of placements is available to meet the specific needs of children and young people and where necessary, specialist placements are spot purchased. In-house provision is complemented by independent fostering placements purchased through a regional preferred provider system. Children placed out of authority are offered the same levels of support as children placed locally, which is good practice. However, there are insufficient 'in-house' foster placements available for older young people who do not wish to live in residential care. Good partnership work has resulted in some high quality responses to the needs of care leavers, including supported living arrangements and access to housing which improves the potential for a successful transition to independence.
67. Case planning, reviews and recording are adequate. The local authority meets all prescribed standards for the care of looked after children. While plans are in place for the majority of children and young people, some are not sufficiently robust or precise in showing clearly the medium term outcomes required; for plans to record 'to stay healthy' or 'to do well in education' does not enable focused planning or meaningful measurement of progress. In some cases examined, permanency planning lacks momentum. At times, case planning and the settled futures of children and young people are delayed, as a result of slow conclusion to matters within the criminal justice system. In general though, inspectors saw evidence of improvements in this area and the effective use of the Public Law Outline, resulting in timely and appropriate outcomes for children.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (good)

68. Leadership and management of looked after children services are good overall. Renaissance, which includes the Children's Trust, is providing good leadership which is resulting in good outcomes for most looked after children and young people. Corporate parenting arrangements are embedded and effective although the current strategy is still in draft form. Elected members play an active role within the corporate parenting strategy and are effectively engaged in promoting joint work to support looked after children, young people and care leavers. Effective arrangements are in place to enable looked after children and young people to voice their views on the services they receive and this is helping to shape services which are responsive to need. Good scrutiny arrangements are in place with good examples of the engagement of children and young people in reviewing processes leading to change. The Children and Young People's Plan provides clear statements of ambition, prioritisation and intent for looked after children's services and objectives are regularly reviewed for impact by the partnership. Priorities for action are appropriately ambitious and effectively support improved practice for looked after children, young people and care leavers. Commissioning processes are tightly managed and contracts are formulated to ensure all outcome objectives are explicit. Safeguarding is given appropriate prominence in respect of commissioned services and contracts. Managers from all partner agencies contribute well to the delivery of priorities and the MALAP provides an effective partnership for the driving forward of joint priorities.
69. Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development, is adequate. Good arrangements are in place to monitor key national indicators and local area agreement targets, but quality measures and local indicators in respect of intermediate outcomes are not fully developed. Performance information is routinely reported to the Children's Trust and other boards. Audit tools have been developed and are being used to determine the effectiveness of recording and compliance with statutory requirements, but they are not sufficiently well refined to fully evaluate the quality of local practice. Staff supervision is taking place regularly but this is not always recorded in a way which challenges practice or sets clear goals for staff working with looked after children and young people. Systems for safe recruitment are in place and there are good examples where looked after young people have been actively involved in recruitment processes. Workforce planning is adequate and there has been considerable effort to develop and sustain a stable workforce to meet the demands of the looked after service. There is, however, considerable local competition for qualified and experienced staff who can readily choose to move to other locations in the Tee-side. In the main the workforce for looked after children and young people is stable, suitably qualified and committed. Newly qualified social workers are appropriately protected and supported. The looked after children nurse

has been involved in the training of new social workers. This has been of benefit in explaining the role of the looked after child health team and has resulted in increased contacts from social workers for help and advice around health issues.

70. User engagement is good. The youth service provides good opportunities for looked after children and young people to become involved in a range of activities and to contribute to planning in the area. Children and young people generally feel involved in their individual plans although some have indicated that changes of social workers have led to some disruption and delays in getting things done. Elected members make considerable effort to engage with looked after children and young people and this is given a suitably high priority within council business. Success and achievement are suitably celebrated in partnership events. Looked after children and young people are provided with good educational support; this is appropriately prioritised within schools and additional support provided when needed. Health services are well targeted on the needs of looked after children and young people, and new processes are being implemented to gain the views of users through well managed questionnaires. Written agreements with parents are not developed in a way that facilitates easy understanding of the aims and purpose of interventions, and the changes required on their part.
71. Partnership working to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers is good. There are good, and some outstanding, examples of partnership working to promote the health of looked after children and young people to safeguard their welfare and to enable them to make a positive contribution. The work of housing in developing suitable accommodation is good. Third sector organisations are well engaged in service delivery and there is a range of small and larger organisations working with looked after children, young people and care leavers. The young carers' scheme is good, and the young people involved speak highly of the importance of this service in their lives. The preventative aspect of this group is helping several young people who are looked after or who are in need of support in their caring roles. Commissioning processes are well established. The council and partners provide effective leadership for looked after children and care leavers. Strategic vision and priorities are clearly articulated, but the translation into day-to-day practice is less consistent and not aided by having a permanency strategy which is not yet fully embedded. The core values associated with effective permanency planning and the harnessing of relevant services to support it are not coherent or universally understood by partners.

72. Equality and diversity are given high priority within the partnership at strategic levels, reflected in the attainment of level 3 of the equality standard. Overall however, responses to the day-to-day implementation of policy for equality and diversity for looked after children and young people are adequate. The authority is committed to active participation in a regional project to recruit foster carers from minority ethnic communities, in order to better meet the cultural needs of looked after children from minority ethnic groups or those of dual heritage. The service has appropriate access to translation and interpreter services via 'Everyday Language Solutions'. The number of looked after children from minority ethnic groups is small, but case records show insufficient specific awareness of their needs. This has been recognised by the authority as an area requiring development as well as the need for broader strategic analysis of factors resulting in their care. The recording of identity and ethnicity is inconsistent. There is insufficient reflection in the workforce of the growing minority ethnic population. Targets to recruit from minority ethnic groups to meet the needs of the local community, and reflect this growing population, have been set but goals have not yet been fully achieved.
73. Value for money is good. The partnership maintains robust systems to monitor financial commitments, with a focus on the cost of placements and the quality of provision. The council and partners have a good understanding of the costs related to the children and young people in care populations and plan well for future demands and resources. Commissioning arrangements and agreement to placement options are tightly controlled to ensure that appropriate care objectives are met and value for money is achieved. Effective arrangements are in place with neighbouring authorities to purchase external placements within agreed price limits. There is good understanding of the local social care market across Teesside. Scrutiny arrangements are good, and there are examples of reviews which have led to more outcome focused approaches, which provide better value for money. The Children's Trust receives performance data on the range of looked after children's services in order to track the impact of different services and outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers.

Record of main findings: Stockton-on-Tees

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Adequate
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Adequate
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Good

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution	Outstanding
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	Good
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Good