

# London Borough of Newham

## 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 board

**Inspection date: 3 June 2014 – 25 June 2014**

**Report published: 8 August 2014**

<p>The overall judgement is that children’s service <b>requires improvement.</b></p>	
<p>The authority is not yet delivering good protection, help or care for children, young people and families.</p> <p>It is Ofsted’s expectation that, as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.</p>	
<p>The judgements on areas of the service that contribute to overall effectiveness are:</p>	
<p><b>1. Children who need help and protection</b></p>	<p><b>Requires improvement</b></p>
<p><b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b></p>	<p><b>Requires improvement</b></p>
<p>2.1 Adoption performance</p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>
<p>2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers</p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>
<p><b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b></p>	<p><b>Requires improvement</b></p>
<p>The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is <b>good.</b></p> <p>The LSCB coordinates the activity of statutory partners and has mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of local arrangements.</p>	

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## Section 1: The local authority - Summary of findings

### Children's services in Newham requires improvement because:

1. The local authority and its partners have made some, but not all, of the improvements recommended in the November 2011 inspection when Ofsted found that safeguarding services and services for looked after children in Newham were adequate.
2. Chronologies recorded on the local authority's electronic system do not include important events in children's lives before the children were referred to children's social care. Full histories are not completed routinely unless the case is in court.
3. Staff in the Triage service (the part of the local authority that people first contact when they are worried about children or think they may need help from a social worker) are very busy. Sometimes there are delays in less urgent requests being passed to a manager to make a decision, or in letting agencies know what actions have been taken. Staff in the Assessment service have too much work to do. This means social workers do not always do everything they need to do at the right time or at a pace that suits children. Managers knew about the problems before this inspection started and had already made arrangements for additional temporary staff that should reduce workloads to a more manageable level.
4. At the moment, agencies refer too many children to the Local Authority whose problems are at an early stage and who could be better helped elsewhere. This means that children and their families are asked to participate in social work assessments that are not necessary. This delays them being referred to the right place to get help and adds to the workloads of social workers.
5. Child in need meetings for children who do not need a child protection plan but still have serious problems are not recorded well. They do not focus enough on whether what is being done is helping children.
6. Many children experience too many changes of social worker. This makes it difficult for children to get to know their social worker well. Sometimes changes of worker lead to delays in plans being carried out.
7. While operational managers check that work has been done within timescales and to a sufficient standard, they do not always focus enough on the quality of the work and the difference it has made for children.
8. When children are unable to live with their families and start to be looked after by the local authority, there are not enough placements available in and around Newham. As a result, some children do not see as much of their family and friends as they would like and a minority have to change school.

## **What does the local authority need to improve?**

### **Priority and immediate action**

The inspection did not find any areas for priority and immediate action

### **Areas for improvement**

9. Evaluate with partners the extent to which early help for children reduces the need for statutory services, and use the evaluation to inform service development.
10. Take action with partners so that more children can receive early help without being referred to children's social care.
11. Ensure that chronologies are of sufficient quality to inform assessments and decision-making effectively.
12. Ensure that records are up to date and reflect activity that has been undertaken.
13. Ensure that managers oversee all cases regularly, focus on children's experiences and, to inform the next steps, consider whether actions taken are having a positive impact.
14. When children and young people return after having been missing, improve the analysis of triggers and patterns to reduce the risk of re-occurrence. The analysis should include looked after children who go missing for short periods from their placements.
15. Increase the number of placements in or close to the borough, particularly for children when they start to be looked after.
16. Improve opportunities for care leavers who do not go on to higher education to experience a wider range of training, apprenticeships and employment.
17. Ensure that all staff have manageable caseloads and that the social care workforce is sufficiently stable and skilled to provide children and their families with services of consistently good quality.
18. Ensure that all staff receive regular, formal supervision as appropriate for their experience and ability.

**The local authority has the following strengths:**

19. Senior leaders in the local authority and key elected members demonstrate a detailed and realistic understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the service and for wider partnership arrangements.
20. Effective and well-attended multi-agency meetings take place regularly to ensure that the plans for vulnerable groups are robust. These include those children at risk of child sexual exploitation, missing, involved in gangs, at risk of offending and who live in households where there is domestic violence.
21. The local authority works well with families before and within court proceedings. As a result, some parents are able to make the positive changes required, and delay in making permanent plans for those children who need them is avoided.
22. The educational support that children who are looked after receive is of high quality and is a significant strength. As a result, many children achieve as well as or better than expected at school and are able to access further and higher education.
23. Young people have described having positive and meaningful relationships with professionals who support them, including social workers, outreach workers, foster carers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO).
24. Adoption is considered for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. When adoption is not appropriate or likely, other types of permanence are rigorously pursued.
25. The local authority is in contact with all its care leavers and provides them with effective support.
26. The local authority works well with a range of strategic bodies, including the Children's Trust, Newham Safeguarding Children's Board (NSCB) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which ensures that services for children are planned and developed in close partnership. It is acknowledged by the NSCB Chair that the local authority has been a driving force in strengthening the effectiveness of these partnerships.

## **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 social work and the difference adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff worked with families and each other, and discussed the effectiveness of the help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is doing and what difference it makes for the people 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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

### **The inspection team**

Lead inspector: Shirley Bailey

Team inspectors: Pauline Turner, Pietro Battista, Brendan Parkinson, Christine Williams, Sara Goodinge and Carmen Rodney.

## Information about this local authority area<sup>1</sup>

### Children living in this area

- Approximately 77,828 children and young people under the age of 18 live in Newham. This is 25% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 33% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 29% (the national average is 18%)
  - in secondary schools is 41% (the national average is 15%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 82% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in England as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian/Asian British (45%) and Black/Black British (25%)
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 75% (the national average is 18%)
  - in secondary schools is 68% (the national average is 14%).
- The number of live births has more than doubled in the last 10 years and 42% of the area's population is under 25.

### Child protection in this area

- At 3 June 2014, assessment had identified 3,389 children as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 3,691 at 31 March 2013.
- At 3 June 2014, 239 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 247 at 31 March 2013.
- At 3 June 2014, 25 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from 23 at 31 March 2013.

### Children looked after in this area

- At 3 June 2014, 416 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 52 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 406 (51 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2013. Of this number:<sup>2</sup>
  - 298 (or 72%) live outside the local authority area

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<sup>1</sup> The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where these were available.

<sup>2</sup> The categories below may overlap.

- 39 live in residential children’s homes, of whom 85% live out of the authority area
  - 8 live in residential special schools,<sup>3</sup> and all of these are out of the authority area
  - 299 live with foster families, of whom 67% live out of the authority area
  - 5 live with parents, of whom three live out of the authority area
  - 20 children are unaccompanied asylum-seekers.
- In the last 12 months:
- there have been 28 adoptions
  - 24 children became subject to special guardianship orders
  - 274 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 11% subsequently returned to be looked after
  - 7 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
  - 6 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

### **Other Ofsted inspections**

- The local authority operates one children’s home. This is a short breaks unit for disabled children. It was judged as adequate at its last full inspection in April 2013 and was making inadequate progress in an interim inspection in October 2013.
- The previous inspection of Newham’s safeguarding services and services for looked after children was in November 2011. The local authority was judged to be adequate for both its safeguarding services and its services for looked after children.
- The most recent inspection of Newham’s adoption service was in October 2011. The service was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of Newham’s fostering service was in December 2011. It was judged to be good.

### **Other information about this area**

- The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since December 2013.
- The Chair of the LSCB has been in post since October 2012.

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<sup>3</sup> These are residential special schools that look after children for fewer than 295 days.

## Inspection judgements about the local authority

### The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Key Judgement	Inspection Grade
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement

27. Inspectors found no cases of children in need of immediate protection during this inspection.
28. Some children and young people are able to access early help through Newham’s network of children’s centres and the Families First service. Some of this help is of good quality and parents regard it positively. However, comprehensive and well-coordinated early help is not yet available. This means that the local authority cannot be confident that children receive the early help they need to prevent difficulties continuing or getting worse.
29. Families First incorporates the local authority’s provision for troubled families. This service undertakes prompt and intensive work with families to meet identified needs. Although the work is sensitive to the child’s culture, the planning of the work does not always identify clear, measureable outcomes. As a result, it is not always clear if the work leads to an improvement in the child’s situation.
30. The early help strategy is very recent. Some services are more developed than others but the authority has not yet fully evaluated their effectiveness. High numbers of children continue to be referred to children’s social care services. These children do not have safeguarding needs but, rather, needs related to a wider range of social issues. Children’s social care responds well to these referrals. Staff in Triage undertake comprehensive checks before passing the work to social workers who complete assessments so that targeted early help can be put in place. It means, however, that many children are being subject to unnecessary statutory assessment processes. This delays the provision of help at a more suitable level; it also reduces the capacity of children’s social care to focus on its core safeguarding functions.
31. When Families First identifies safeguarding concerns, it shares these promptly with children’s social care. The children continue to receive support from Families First, affording them continuity and enhanced support. Weekly meetings between the Families First service and children’s social care result in a shared understanding of thresholds and strong arrangements for the transfer of children and their families between the two services.
32. Children who are in need of immediate protection are appropriately identified and referred promptly to children’s social care by a range of partner agencies. Children’s social care acts swiftly to ensure that they are protected. While discussions about the child protection strategy are held routinely with the police, the records are not always comprehensive or do not always show the

rationale for decisions. They do not always include the views of, or provide for consultation with, other relevant professionals. The local authority has recently begun work with partners to improve this aspect of joint working.

33. The emergency duty team (EDT) responds promptly out of hours, making the necessary arrangements to protect children. However, inconsistencies in how information is held on a child's file mean that EDT staff sometimes spend too much time looking for key information. For example, poor record-keeping about children who go missing means that EDT cannot quickly establish the risks to young people to inform decision-making.
34. The quality of assessments of children's circumstances across targeted services and children's social care is variable. Operational managers do not challenge inconsistent practice sufficiently. Good-quality assessments identify risks and protective factors succinctly. They are effective in considering historical information, children's identity and their cultural needs, and are informed by information from professionals, children and families. Other assessments are weaker: they are overly descriptive, with limited analysis that does not clearly articulate risks to, or concerns about, children as a result of parental behaviour. Further, weaker assessments do not seek or use children's views consistently. Many cases do not have chronologies that are sufficiently comprehensive to inform assessments and planning effectively.
35. The safeguarding and welfare needs of children who live in households where parents have no recourse to public funds are well considered through assessment. These assessments demonstrate a good understanding and consideration of families' cultural needs. Where no safeguarding issues are identified, cases are appropriately transferred to a specialist worker who continues to support these families to resolve their legal and financial status.
36. The pre-birth assessments undertaken by the hospital social work team are timely and of good quality, demonstrating effective multi-agency working with health professionals. Assessments give appropriate attention to safeguarding disabled children.
37. Assessments resulting in plans to support families mostly reflect the needs that have been identified. Initial plans usually focus effectively on outcomes and show good planning to improve the child's situation. For many children who are subject to child protection planning, these plans mean that risks are reduced and that escalation is timely if the children's circumstances do not improve.
38. Chairs of child protection conferences manage these meetings effectively. They review previous plans well, analyse progress and consider if the actions being taken are reducing risks sufficiently.
39. Core group meetings between child protection conferences are held regularly and are well attended by partner professionals. In very many cases, a parent will also attend. However, in the main, these meetings evaluate the progress of tasks and rarely consider explicitly whether risk is reducing as a result of the

multi-agency support offered to the family or what further actions might be required to promote the child's safety.

40. When children are being supported as children 'in need', the work done to help them is often less robust. Visits are less frequent and direct work with them to understand their experiences is limited. Meetings to coordinate and review their support do not take place as regularly as they do for children with child protection plans, and the cases are overseen less robustly. This means that, in some cases, support in a crisis is reactive rather than planned; in others, it can lead to drift. However, inspectors also saw examples of families who were receiving effective multi-agency support that prevented problems from escalating and empowered parents to make safer choices for themselves and their children.
41. Services are available locally to support parents who have problems with substance misuse. While professionals that support parents do not often attend multi-agency meetings, they routinely share relevant information with social workers about parents' progress and the impact of their substance misuse on their parenting ability. The information is used to inform children's plans.
42. For children whose parents have mental health needs, child protection issues are immediately considered and appropriate action is taken. In a small number of the cases seen, insufficient attention was given to achieving sustainable, long-term support for the children, after the immediate crisis had been resolved.
43. Sampling undertaken by the Newham Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) indicates that 80% of police notifications to the local authority are related to domestic abuse, 20% of child protection cases show it as a primary concern and it features in 36% of cases. Families affected by domestic abuse are referred to a range of services and victims receive good provision. Consultant clinicians, based within teams, take good account of the experiences of the children in these families. This leads to more effective, direct and purposeful work with them and a focus on helping them to communicate their experiences and increase their resilience.
44. In many cases, children are able to share their views and experiences with social workers. Social Workers visit children routinely in their own home and spend meaningful time with them alone. However, multiple changes in social workers for some children mean that their experiences are less well understood. For example, performance information shows that for the period October to December 2013, of children receiving services as a child in need, 354 children had had three or more social workers; although proportionally low at 16%, this is a large number of children. In the same period, of children who were subject to a child protection plan, 16% had experienced three or more changes of worker – a reduction from the previous quarter of 32%.
45. Arrangements to respond to homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are good. The local authority provides almost all of them with appropriate accommodation and they

become looked after children. The Intensive Youth Intervention Team supports a very small number of young people who do not wish to become looked after. Young people have their legal rights clearly explained to them.

46. Records that reflect events and interventions with children and their families are not always up to date. Sometimes when cases are closed, significant gaps remain in the information. This means that, if problems re-emerge later, there is the potential for further work with families to be compromised.
47. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment conferences (MARAC) and Multi-Agency Public Protection arrangements (MAPPA) focus well on the safeguarding and welfare needs of children. Attendance at these meetings is good and relevant professionals from across the partnership prepare well for them. This enables information to be shared effectively across agencies. Sufficiently regular meetings ensure that information-sharing is timely and purposeful. Action plans are clear, with good attention given to holding professionals to account for any activity that has been allocated to them.
48. The Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meeting is effective in coordinating plans for young people who are vulnerable to, or have experienced, sexual exploitation. It also provides an opportunity for senior managers' scrutiny of the plans. The meeting is well chaired, with clear direction and effective planning.
49. Agencies share information effectively and take in information and intelligence about gang activity and missing children. Strategic issues include, for example, the need for targeted support for schools where there is higher incidence of gang activity. As a result of partnership working, additional support is identified for individual children and plans are strengthened. The Multi-Agency Risk and Vulnerability Panel complements the MASE meeting to ensure that young people at risk of offending are well supported.
50. The police notify the local authority promptly when children are reported as missing from home. However, social work practice and management oversight in responding to such episodes are not always robust. While children are seen on their return, these visits do not always sufficiently analyse the triggers for why young people went missing or provide sufficient documentary evidence to analyse patterns and develop action plans to reduce the risk of future missing episodes. The risks for looked after children who are missing from their placements for short periods are not always well considered.
51. Good partnership work between different agencies, including the UK Border Agency, ensures that all parties are well informed when a child is missing from education. The local authority maintains a comprehensive record of children and young people who are known to be educated at home. Safeguarding is given a high priority and, when parents choose to educate their children at home, the local authority makes its procedures clear from the beginning. Regular monitoring and networking with other local authorities and organisations that support parents and families underpin the work.

52. Access to advocacy for children in need of help and protection is increasing from a very low base. This is the result of a dedicated service and awareness raising by social workers and managers. Despite this, opportunities for young people to attend meetings about plans for them or to be represented by an advocate if they choose not to attend are not yet consistent.
53. Arrangements to support children who are identified as privately fostered are appropriate. Currently, private fostering arrangements support 25 children. They are visited within the statutory timescales, are routinely spoken to and their views about the arrangements are recorded. Until very recently, these children were visited by whoever was on duty; however, they are now supported by a specialist social worker. This offers improved consistency for them and their carers.
54. The local authority pays good attention to securing long-term care for children with their private foster carers through supporting court applications for residence and special guardianship orders. A twice-yearly private fostering panel, chaired by a senior manager, provides a good level of management scrutiny. The panel reviews and approves all existing private fostering arrangements.
55. Very low numbers of new private fostering arrangements have been identified and notified to the local authority recently. Notifications have increased from a low point of seven in 2012–13, with 14 notifications of potential arrangements across 2013–14, of which only one was a private fostering arrangement. To date, one new assessment has started in 2014–15. Newham's performance, while low compared to national figures, is in line with the rest of London. The NSCB is aware of this and has undertaken extensive steps to raise the profile of privately fostered children, but this work has not yet increased the number of notifications.
56. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements for managing and responding to allegations of abuse or the mistreatment of children and young people by professionals and carers are effective. In almost all cases, allegations are responded to swiftly, with timely initial meetings. Records of the meetings are clear and well recorded, and the support needs of children and the alleged perpetrator are considered effectively while investigations are underway. Cases are reviewed routinely and challenge from the LADO minimises delays in reaching a conclusion. The LADO ensures that all actions are completed, including referral, in substantiated cases, to the relevant professional governing bodies and the Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS). The LADO produces an annual report, shared with the NSCB. A sub-group of the NSCB works to raise awareness of the LADO's role and the responsibilities of those working with children, particularly within faith organisations, to act appropriately when concerns arise. Targeted awareness-raising is undertaken with organisations that come to the attention of the LADO.

## The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Requires improvement

57. The local authority uses family group conferencing and a range of evidence-based parenting programmes effectively to support children to remain at home who might otherwise be looked after. Inspectors did not see any cases where children had become looked after unnecessarily when they had entered care through a social work assessment. However, a significant number of children become looked after in urgent, unforeseen circumstances. In some of these cases, limited consideration is given to other options, such as the child’s extended family.
58. A very low proportion of children who return home after becoming looked after require further care; only 17 (4%) children of those currently looked after had had a previous episode of care. This indicates that children who return home are likely to be receiving sufficient support to prevent their re-entry to care.
59. Although single assessments are limited in the extent to which they identify all the circumstances and experiences of the child, they are risk-based and sufficient for decisions to be based on them. They show clearly the nature and type of placements required. However, these assessments are rarely updated as children’s and families’ circumstances change, when care plans are monitored and reviewed. The broader single assessment is therefore not being well maintained as a continuing, holistic view of strengths, needs and risks. It does not support reflection on what is the best plan for the child.
60. In most of the cases seen, the right decisions are made to identify children who are in need of local authority care. The threshold of care panel undertakes an important role in considering whether children need to become looked after.
61. The local authority responds effectively when alternative arrangements need to be made for children’s care. Evidence of managers driving decision-making and exercising oversight is limited and it has not always been fully recorded. However, this is improving and examples exist of thorough, focused work. Recording generally is up to date, although it often does not fully detail the extent of work undertaken to support looked after children.
62. Children who need protecting away from their family and who enter care through statutory interventions benefit strongly from legal and social care services working constructively within the Public Law Outline (PLO). This is well supported by a dedicated manager for court cases. The work undertaken at all stages is focused and effective. As a result, there have

been sustained improvements in reducing timescales in court proceedings. The time taken for proceedings has reduced from 67 weeks in mid-2013 to 44 weeks over the whole of 2013–14. The most recent data indicate continued improvement, with a current average of 39 weeks. Cases still in proceedings are expected to conclude at 30 weeks on average. While this is still longer than the target of 26 weeks, it shows good progress from the position a year ago. This has been achieved through working actively in partnership with the courts, and with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), both on individual cases and strategically.

63. Children and young people who are looked after are seen routinely by social workers and seen alone. In the majority of cases seen by inspectors, including individuals within large families, children are helped to express how they are feeling; this is used to inform plans. The proportion of children who waited longer than eight weeks for a social worker's visit is low (23 children, or 5.5%). Children placed some distance away from the local authority area who spoke to inspectors confirmed that they see their social worker, as well as their IRO, and see the relationship as helpful, informative and constructive.
64. However, children are less likely to trust and respond openly to their social worker if they have a number of changes of social worker: 26% of looked after children have experienced three or more changes.
65. Social workers and foster carers are given good guidance about engaging with children to prepare them for their future, for example, adoption. The majority of looked after children who would benefit from life story work receive it, and inspectors saw examples of good-quality work in this area. For a minority, however, such work is not completed in a timely manner.
66. IROs seek to ensure that each child has a say in their plan, although plans do not always capture their views sufficiently or profile them. IROs provide support for and challenge to agencies, during and outside reviews, with a number of concerns raised under the 'escalation' arrangements. Almost half of the cases raised under the 'escalation' arrangements in 2013 related to drift in implementing plans and undertaking actions that had been identified as being needed. Managers responded readily to these concerns.
67. Obtaining the right placement for children is a strong focus of the authority's work. As a result, levels of stability for a large proportion of children are high. Once a child's needs are identified, there is a clear, determined commitment to finding a suitable match for the child, although the majority of placements are away from the borough, family, friends and schools. Children do not remain looked after where a safe return to their family is likely. The local authority focuses efforts on pursuing a viable placement with the child's extended family for those who become looked after. However, this is not always reviewed if the child remains looked after for a lengthy period.

68. Some plans are not updated sufficiently regularly: 35% of plans for all looked after children had not been updated within the past year. The initial plan tended to be continued, whether it was successful or not. A small number of children who enter care under the age of 10 continue to experience uncertainty. Mostly, they have complex needs and they continue to be looked after for several years without being provided with permanence.
69. Reviews of plans take place routinely and within the required timescales. They focus on the achievements and deficits within the plan and, in most cases, manage to hold contributing agencies to account. Children's health and educational needs are well profiled, with 97% of looked after children having had a health assessment within the previous year, 95% having up to date immunisations, and 94% having had dental checks, although health assessments are not always undertaken in a timely way.
70. The local authority considers adoption and other forms of permanence for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. Figures for 2013–14 show 27 of 28 children with a Placement Order were placed within 12 months. For older children coming into care, adoption is not automatically ruled out, but the approach taken is to try to achieve stability and continuity for this group by looking at long-term fostering, if it is not probable that an adoption placement would be found. The number of SGO (special guardianship order) arrangements being achieved in the past year has shown a significant, positive increase from 12 in 2012–13 to 24 in 2013–14; seven of these were made to foster carers, showing the authority's increasingly persistent focus on this as an option for children wherever possible.
71. Effective strategies for finding families for children are leading to an increase in the number of foster carers, connected carers and adopters. Improved use of success data enables the local authority to concentrate its energies on activities which, in the past, have led to success in recruiting new families.
72. The recruitment of foster carers, however, is not yet at a sufficient level. In terms of both capacity and the range of skills needed, it cannot yet provide for Newham's looked after children in terms of their ages, languages, cultures, ethnicities, and the complexity of their needs. Although plans are emerging to deal with this, the authority recognises that implementation is still some way off. Just 28% of children in care are placed within the borough at present. A further 42% are placed across 21 other London boroughs, with 29% being placed outside London. The local authority makes timely and suitable arrangements to meet the health and education needs of children placed out of Newham, spot-purchasing services when necessary. Children placed out of the area told inspectors they were happy in their placements and they have regular contact with their social worker and their families.
73. The authority pays particular attention to sibling attachment and ethnicity, although there is not a sufficiently diverse range of carers available when

children are placed initially. Subsequent placements are more often planned well, particularly in relation to the child's identity and culture. If a placement is not a strong match, in most cases sufficient attention is paid to respecting the children's needs, wishes and values and those of their families. Within this, the authority routinely prioritises and promotes the importance of the child's relationships with siblings. Where children cannot live with their brothers and sisters, contact is considered sufficiently, although the reviews do not always give this a strong profile.

74. Some children's plans are changed to long-term fostering and, where strong attachments are identified, the children remain with their carers. Practitioners support attachment well when the plan is for an enduring placement.
75. The local authority currently procures the majority of placements it uses through direct purchase, according to need. No children were placed in provision that was judged as inadequate and just three children had been placed in provision identified as adequate. However, all these were stable placements for these children.
76. The profile of the looked after children population has changed markedly, and continues to do so. The local authority is aware of and takes account of these changes in its planning, commissioning and procurement. In many cases identifying the placement and preparing and introducing the child to it is done carefully and sensitively. This contributes to the authority's strong and improving performance in achieving stability for children. A relatively low proportion of the current looked after cohort have experienced three or more placement changes (9.4%), and this figure is now below the national average (11% in 2013). However, a much higher proportion of children experience one or more changes of placement (26.9%).
77. The authority is currently giving a high priority to training foster carers. There is a stronger focus on the raised expectations of carers, as well as on increased support for tackling complex and often challenging behaviours. A more direct consultation and advice service is planned for carers to help them deal with these. Carers welcome the support the local authority provides. It is not always clear, however, what delegated authority is available or in place for carers. In practice, they exercise a major role in supporting the placed child's education and social experiences.
78. The authority has high aspirations for looked after children and gives priority to selecting the best schools for them. The attainment gap is closing with all pupils nationally. Across Key Stages 2 and 4, the 2013 cohorts of looked after children achieved well. This was despite their extremely challenging pasts and the fact that an above-average proportion of them required additional learning support. At Key Stage 2, over half of all looked after children achieved the standard expected nationally in English, while two thirds achieved similar levels in mathematics. Standards achieved in GCSE examinations improved significantly, with 40% of all looked after children

obtaining five or more A\*– C grades, including English and mathematics; 57% achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent. As a whole, the 2013 cohort achieved GCSE grade B as the average grade. Although most looked after children placed out of the borough achieved well, those educated within the borough obtained better results.

79. The quality of personal education plans (PEP) is variable. Most PEPs are completed on time and the majority of them provide detailed accounts of the progress of looked after children. However, these plans seldom include specific targets that are linked to academic achievement or to planning to accelerate progress. They do not have measureable success criteria and clear timelines and milestones.
80. The virtual school is very active in engaging with looked after children. Fewer than 5% of the children have experienced two or more schools over the past two years. Attendance is given a high priority and, overall, it was 90% in 2013/14. There are few fixed-term exclusions and there have been no permanent exclusions in the past year. There is a good focus on the needs of children who are not on a full-time timetable. Of all looked after children, 14.6% are identified as being disabled, most with substantial learning needs. The virtual school ensures that there is sufficient support and ambition for this group of children.
81. There are arrangements in place for when children are absent from their placements for short periods as well as when they go missing from care. Almost all (19 out of the 21) children with one or more missing episode are placed outside of the area. Information and intelligence at the point the problem arises are coordinated effectively, with evidence of initial consideration of causes and risks, including whether exploitation may be a feature. With those who go missing more frequently, the review of triggers, patterns and protective behaviours to support the young person is limited.
82. Work to support children and young people who are bullied or who are vulnerable to bullying, or whose friends encourage them to make poor choices, is effective.
83. When children experience other difficulties, such as psychological or emotional ill-health, difficulties with alcohol or misuse of other substances, support is readily sourced within the area of the placement or, if close to Newham, within the borough. Ten young people are identified as having a substance misuse problem, down from 28 in 2012. Of those looked after and receiving SDQ (strength and difficulty questionnaire) assessments, 42 of them (22%) had high scores. Support is often sought from a Children and Family Consultation Service (CFCS) practitioner to enable referrals to be made and links to be achieved in a timely way. Within the borough, 98 looked after children or their carers are being supported by the CFCS, with almost half of the cases being open for more than a year. Very few (8%) do not take up the service.

**The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good**

84. Adoption is considered for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. Although the number of adoption orders decreased slightly in 2013–14, permanence through adoption and SGOs increased overall during the year. This included groups of children who are harder to place, such as disabled children, those who have complex needs and sibling groups with a wide age-range.
  
85. The 2012–13 adoption scorecard shows that Newham performed well in the timeliness of the various stages of a child’s journey to adoption. Although not all areas had improved during that year, the three-year performance data show that Newham is meeting the government’s thresholds and is performing better than the average for England.
  
86. Current unvalidated data and case file information indicate that timescales remain good. Active parallel planning and good, regular information-sharing between the adoption and fieldwork teams lead to the early notification of children who may need an adoption placement. Together with an effective system to track all individuals for whom adoption is being considered, this has had a positive impact on children moving into an adoptive placement in a timely way. As at 31 March 2014, 37 children were subject to placement orders, of whom 22 were placed with prospective adopters.
  
87. Work is undertaken at the child’s pace. Adopters are given good support through each stage of the process. Timeliness is also helped because good working relationships with post-adoption workers are established before the adoption order is granted, and support is provided from the point of the placement.
  
88. Recruiting sufficient adopters within Newham is challenging, in part because of its demography and the local housing stock. The local authority uses a range of strategies for finding families, in collaboration with key partners such as the North East London Adoption Group and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). Recruitment campaigns are targeted in order to match the profile of the children for whom permanency is sought, such as attending events in Black History month and targeting churches and faith groups within the Black community, since the number of children from an African heritage who are in need of adoption is growing. This work is resulting in an increasing number of approved adopters from a wide range of lifestyles and cultures. However, the pool of adopters does not yet fully reflect the diverse needs and numbers of children waiting to be adopted.
  
89. Children who cannot be matched locally are placed on the national adoption register to ensure that as wide a search as possible is made to secure a permanent family for them. Membership of the North East London

consortium offers a wider choice of placements and complements in-house, family-finding activities.

90. The local authority recognises that more work is required to develop the pool of adopters and range of placements further, including concurrent placements, an increase in 'fostering to adopt' placements and further targeted recruitment to secure permanence for the children at most risk of not being matched with an adoptive family.
91. Timeliness for approving adopters is satisfactory. In 2012–2013, over 75% of all adoptive families were approved in less than nine months from the registration of interest to the date of the approval. The well-structured process is receptive to working at a pace which suits individual adopters. All initial enquiries receive a prompt, personal response. Potential adopters regarded this early responsiveness highly. A sound, two-stage system for recruiting, preparing and assessing potential adopters is well established. It is thorough and challenging. Prospective adopters who look as though they could meet the needs of a child for whom family-finding is in progress are fast tracked. Using experienced, external assessors and a skilled, knowledgeable, external facilitator for preparation courses increases Newham's ability to be flexible and responsive to potential adopters.
92. Preparation courses for adopters include input from adopters and birth parents, and a DVD made by Newham's birth mothers and grandmothers group. Adopters told inspectors that they considered the assessment process to be thought-provoking (particularly the input from birth parents), timely and fair. They thought that, combined with the post-approval training to which they have access, it prepares them well to meet the needs of the children placed with them.
93. Prospective adopter's records (PAR) are thorough, with a good level of analysis. All of them are at least satisfactory and the majority of them are good. Children's placement reports are detailed and comprehensive. The views of birth parents regarding the plans for adoption are sensitively reported on, and particular attention is paid to attachments to brothers and sisters and to children's cultural needs.
94. The Adoption Panel is effective in ensuring the timely approval of prospective adopters and the matching of children to families. Panels are well managed and chaired. Panel members are suitably knowledgeable and well trained. Timely input from legal and medical professionals is available for all panels. This, together with the good-quality information from the reports, ensures that the panel makes robust recommendations to the agency decision-maker about matching.
95. The authority is committed to improving the quality of recruitment and the assessment of adopters through a range of methods, such as obtaining feedback from prospective adopters about their experience of the service. Quarterly meetings between the independent chair of the panel and the

agency decision-maker identify any themes and put action plans in place. Routine quality assurance of all PARs is robust; the panel's and managers' regular scrutiny of the tracking sheet minimises any drift.

96. In-house support and effective signposting ensure that adopters have a wide range of commissioned post-adoption support services. These services are well received and are effective in supporting placements. An increasing number of 'letterbox' contact and direct contact arrangements are well supported and effectively organised. Children, their adoptive families, and birth relatives are properly informed about post-adoption support. Unvalidated data show that 2013–14 has seen a dramatic increase in the number of requests for adoption support assessments, from two to 52 in the last year. While many of these are relatively simple contacts with other agencies over specific issues, a number of them are longer term and more complex.
97. The relatively new group that has been established for birth fathers and grandfathers and the more established group for birth mothers and grandmothers are both growing in membership. Feedback shows that the groups are a source of valued support to their members.
98. Placement stability is good, with no placement disruptions in the last 24 months. This is because of the sound work undertaken throughout the adoption process, including the provision of post-adoption support.

<p><b>The graded judgement about the experiences and progress of care leavers is that it is good</b></p>
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99. Planning for their transition to adulthood begins appropriately early when the children are looked after. A well-managed transfer process, between the looked after children team and the leaving care team, supports smooth transition. This means that when young people transfer to the leaving care service, their pathway plan has already been established and reviewed by their IRO.
100. Transition planning begins earlier for children who have complex needs. Inspectors saw examples of young people who had very complex needs having comprehensive support plans that were effective in easing their transition to adult services.
101. Pathway plans promote independence. They enable young people to remain with their foster carer under a 'supported lodgings' arrangement, continue with their education and enjoy leisure activities through a commissioned package of support, funded by a personal budget.
102. Pathway plans are mostly good; some seen were very good. The template used has been developed in consultation with care leavers. Plans provide good information on the young person's health, education, training and

accommodation needs. They include national insurance numbers, details of financial entitlements, and information about complaints and advocacy. Most young people confirmed that they receive copies of their plans and that the plans are reviewed and updated regularly. Care leavers said that it often takes a long time before they are provided with passports; these are important for young people to confirm their identity.

103. Young people are given good additional educational support through Newham Virtual School for Looked After Children. For example, where English is not their first language, Saturday classes and homework clubs provide additional help for young people. This enables them to achieve standards of English and mathematics to access foundation courses or higher education.
104. The local authority is ambitious for its young people. They are positively encouraged and supported to continue with their education beyond 18. The most recent published data, from March 2013, show that 10% of care leavers who were looked after when they were 16 were still in education at the age of 19. This strong performance is twice the England average for that year and better than that of statistical neighbours (6%). The virtual school creates ample opportunities for care leavers to experience higher education through organised visits, including ambassadorial talks from previous care leavers about their experiences. New links with local universities are being developed to encourage more students to enter higher education.
105. The proportion of care leavers, (58%) currently in education, employment or training (EET) matches performance nationally but is slightly lower than that of statistical neighbours. In 2013, 33% of care leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET), a figure comparable to that of statistical neighbours and the England average (34%). The local authority's unvalidated data for 2014 now include care leavers up to the age of 21. These data show improved performance on the 2013 figures for care leavers in education, employment and training.
106. Currently, 54 care leavers attend university, with 16 young people having graduated in the last two years. This is a significant achievement, particularly given the low levels of educational attainment of many young people when they first become looked after. The local authority supports young people with accommodation during the summer break, providing additional funding to maintain the placement or supporting the young person to return to their foster placement if possible. This contributes to the young people's feelings of security and enables them to complete their studies successfully.
107. The local authority has a good track record of care leavers attending university. However, although this is a positive feature, this route will not suit everyone. The authority recognises the need to improve its performance in supporting care leavers to access apprenticeships and employment.

108. The local authority monitors the progress of care leavers well and is in touch with all of them. It continues to support young people who change their plan or who do not succeed at the first attempt, such as young people who have got into financial difficulties and require the local authority to fund a second deposit for a flat, and others who have been supported to change course at university or college for another one which suits them better.
109. Pathway plans show that good support is available for care leavers to address their physical and emotional health needs. They are offered counselling and, where they are required, specialist therapeutic placements are commissioned. The CFCS service provides time-limited support to young people it is working with before they leave care; regular advice and training for the outreach workers in the leaving care team enable them to support care leavers' emotional needs more effectively. When more specialist help is needed, care leavers have access to services that provide counselling or therapeutic support from some voluntary sector organisations. They also have access to universal health services, including those to keep them safe, such as sexual health services.
110. A health passport has been in place for two years, with 87% of 18-year-olds receiving their passport in 2013. However, some young people over the age of 19 might not all have the necessary documents detailing their health history. In these cases, they can only rely on the information in their pathway plan.
111. A menu of accommodation options for care leavers is designed to meet individuals' needs at various stages of their transition. The range of housing options is good, so they are able to begin planning safely for independence before they are 16. Care leavers who need it move into semi-independent accommodation with support before finally moving into independent living. Some young people in foster care stay with their carers beyond 18. At this point their placement is converted into 'supported lodgings', affording continuity for the young person. In 2014, 15% of young people were in supported lodgings, performance that is better than that for England and statistical neighbours.
112. At the time of the inspection, a very small minority of care leavers were in hostel accommodation. This was a temporary measure for appropriate reasons. This performance is consistent with the March 2013 returns; it is better than the national average and the performance of statistical neighbours.
113. Care leavers from the Children in Care Council talked positively of the outreach workers in the leaving care team and the children's rights worker. They felt, in particular, that the Children's Rights service was a real strength, providing them with information about entitlements, challenging agencies on their behalf and effecting changes that made a difference to their lives. Care leavers were more critical of the information available to support them into independence. They are in the process of completing a care leavers' guide

with the help of the Children's Rights Service. This has been under development for 12 months and needs to be completed.

114. Young people described positive and meaningful relationships with professionals who support them. One young person said that without her foster carers she "wouldn't be where she is today" and that being in care had made a huge difference to her life.

## Leadership, management and governance

Key Judgement	Judgement Grade
Leadership, management and governance	Requires improvement

115. Good progress has been made in most of the areas identified for improvement in a pilot, multi-agency child protection inspection in 2012 and in the safeguarding and looked after children inspection in 2011. However, in other areas, despite concentrated focus, progress has been much slower. Some key social work and front-line management activity is still not done consistently well enough to ensure that children receive a good service.
116. The current staffing within the triage and assessment parts of the service is insufficient to meet demand. Lack of capacity for triage results in delays in non-urgent work and in communicating outcomes to those who made the initial referrals. Within the assessment service, although workers generally undertake tasks within acceptable timescales, the quality of the work varies. Contacts with children are sometimes affected adversely by pressures of time.
117. The senior leadership team has recognised these problems and has made short-term plans, approved by elected members, to increase staffing levels. The plans are linked to a wider, long-term aim of reducing inappropriate referrals by improving early help. At the time of the inspection, these plans had not been implemented, and workloads in the triage and assessment service were unacceptably high.
118. Securing an experienced and stable workforce is a significant challenge for the local authority. Changes in staffing at all levels in the organisation have been considerable. In the social work workforce, 17% of staff are newly qualified. They have been recruited under the assessed and supported year in employment scheme (ASYE). The ASYE programme provides high-quality support and training, including opportunities for reflective practice. The ASYE staff to which inspectors spoke felt both supported and challenged. However, some ASYE staff in assessment and intervention teams did not have protected caseloads. A further 10% of staff is retained newly qualified social workers (NQSW). They are concentrated in the assessment and intervention parts of the service where there is the most pressure.
119. The proportion of agency staff covering vacant social work posts varies across teams. It ranges from over a third of agency staff in the disabled children's team and in the assessment service to 11% in the leaving care service. However, 57% of the total agency staff in the assessment service has been in post for more than six months, thereby affording a degree of stability to teams.
120. The local authority has not yet achieved a stable, sufficient and suitably skilled social care workforce. Although some of the staffing changes are due to the purposeful and necessary management of staff performance, staff turnover and

vacancies, nevertheless many children experience multiple changes of social worker. The local authority recognises that reducing this number is an area where it needs to improve. The current movement of staff within some services, combined with a campaign to replace agency staff with permanent workers recruited from overseas, assists the local authority to achieve its longer-term goals. However, in the short term, some children will continue to experience too many changes.

121. An overarching workforce recruitment and retention strategy is lacking. However, senior managers described a coherent, multi-faceted approach, linked to the local authority's professional development framework. The framework is informed by a comprehensive analysis of training needs, and it is well designed to enable staff to develop the skills and competencies they need at every level. It offers a clear pathway of career progression, from ASYE onwards, as part of a wider strategy to retain experienced staff.
122. Training is evaluated, but a more robust analysis of its impact on outcomes for children would be beneficial. The lack of a stable workforce means that good practice learnt from training is lost when staff move on and training needs to be repeated.
123. The senior management team in its current configuration is relatively new. The interim director of children's services (DCS) has been in post for six months. She has the confidence of elected members and the chief executive (CEO). Combined with the continuity of a permanent Assistant Director (AD), who also has the full confidence and backing of the senior leadership team, this has helped to accelerated progress.
124. Senior leaders in the local authority and key elected members have a detailed and realistic understanding of strengths and areas for development, both for the service itself and for wider partnerships. Their understanding derives from robust local knowledge, information from regular performance management, and feedback from staff, children and young people.
125. Elected members have an open and trusting relationship with the NSCB Chair, the CEO and the DCS. The Mayor, Lead Member and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board meet officers regularly, both formally and informally, to discuss problems and raise questions and challenges. This is alongside their attendance at scrutiny meetings. The scrutiny function has been significantly strengthened following Ofsted's pilot inspection in 2012. Members show a clear commitment to and enthusiasm for ensuring that they prioritise issues facing children and young people.
126. Improving outcomes for children in need of early help and looked after children are identified as key priorities. Aspirational plans to transform services into an outcomes-driven model, informed by research, form part of the local authority's wider strategy to build resilience. These plans have yet to be fully implemented and it is therefore too early to evaluate their impact.

127. The effectiveness of the local authority's role as corporate parents was reviewed in 2013. Leaders recognised that they fell notably short of their own expectations and ambitions. Subsequently, corporate parenting has been significantly refreshed. A number of activities have been put in place, but members and senior officers acknowledge that these have yet to have sufficient impact. Plans are in place to ensure that members new to dealing with children's issues receive relevant training so that they understand and fulfil their scrutiny and corporate parenting roles.
128. The local authority and its partners recognise that early help services are underdeveloped and that they need to be a priority. Learning derived from developing the triage and Families First services, as well as significant work with schools to establish the Foundations for Learning programme, has been brought together in the Early Help Strategy. This was agreed by the Children's Trust during the inspection.
129. Early help services are currently not fully coordinated, and neither the local authority nor the Children's Trust has established effective systems to evaluate their range, quality, quantity and impact. This means that the partnership cannot yet be confident that it is identifying or meeting sufficiently the wider needs of children and their families. It also cannot assure itself that the early help it provides is effective in avoiding escalation to targeted or statutory services.
130. The local authority works well with a range of strategic bodies, including the Children's Trust, the NSCB and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), so that services for children are planned and developed in close partnership. Increasingly, children's issues are being incorporated into the work of the Health and Well-being Board to ensure that their needs are prioritised successfully and aligned with developing services for adults. The Chair of the NSCB acknowledges that the local authority has been a driving force in ensuring that the needs of vulnerable children remain a primary consideration; this is at a time of challenging financial austerity and competing demands.
131. The range and accuracy of performance management information have improved significantly since the last inspection. Managers at all levels in children's services routinely scrutinise up-to-date performance management information. However, some areas of scrutiny are underdeveloped, for example, in early help and in reporting by IROs.
132. At a strategic level, the information is reported to a range of boards, such as the scrutiny panel, the Children's Trust and the NSCB. These monitor and scrutinise services for children and families. Strategic managers within children's social care services interrogate performance information regularly and effectively to plan developments in the service and to identify what requires greater analysis. Prompt action is taken to analyse any issues that are identified, for example, through audits or service reviews.

133. At an operational level, managers regularly use performance information to monitor social work activity, such as the timeliness of assessments and the frequency of visits to children and families. However, managers' oversight is overly focused on compliance with the processes rather than on ensuring that interventions meet children's needs effectively. This was reflected in many of the cases that inspectors selected for the local authority to audit. First-level operational managers rated the work more positively than more senior managers; the latter had a clearer focus on outcomes. This demonstrates disparity between what senior and operational managers consider to be good practice, and in their expectations of social work staff.
134. From its own audit activity, the local authority has recently identified the frequency and quality of professional supervision as an area for development. The service practice guidance on supervision has been updated and recirculated to managers. Staff report that, in the main, they have regular supervision and feel well supported by their line managers. However, almost all supervision files that inspectors scrutinised had gaps in recording. These included the files of members of staff whose capability or conduct had already been identified as causing concern. Recordings were brief and task-orientated with little evidence of reflection. It shows that, while senior managers have acted to assure the quality and frequency of professional supervision, actions have not yet resulted in consistently positive results. Progress in improving performance is therefore not yet secure.
135. Commissioning services for children and young people is carefully aligned with key strategic priorities. This commissioning is informed by a range of intelligence to determine the needs of the local population. It includes direct feedback from children and families, contract monitoring arrangements and performance information, together with the joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA) which is being refreshed. Some services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), are commissioned jointly with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). In other areas, the CCG and the local authority commissioners work well together, at a strategic level, with provider services on the Child Health Improvement Partnership. Links to the Health and Well-Being Board have been strengthened in recent months. Such arrangements enable children's services to approach commissioning flexibly. Where necessary, the authority decommissions services that are no longer in line with its key priorities.
136. Some services have been commissioned or re-shaped as a result of more focused activity. For example, services to deal with domestic abuse have now been brought together in a one-stop shop; two new services have been commissioned to complement the existing independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) service. The impact of this change is not yet measurable.
137. The local authority seeks the views of children and young people to inform service development through a variety of means, including surveys and focus groups. A recent example of change as a result of young people's feedback is

the refurbishment of the Beckton Road office to make it a more child-friendly space.

138. The use of advocacy across children's services and within the looked after children's service is growing and it is now considered more routinely. Consistent themes emerging from advocacy cases are transition planning and placement moves, communication problems with allocated workers, response times from social workers to service users and advocates, and foster carers making referrals because of concerns about children's care plans.
139. While complaints are treated seriously and there is a clear log of themes arising, there is little evidence that learning from complaints improves the effectiveness of services.
140. The majority of the actions within the pledge for looked after children are vigorously pursued, including free access to leisure passes, recognition of their achievements, access to an active and robust children's rights service and senior managers' attendance at the Children in Care Council.
141. The Children in Care Council has only a very small number of children and young people within the two age groups. The children and young people are engaged constructively in supporting changes in services, for example, in developing a 'menu of choice' for meetings; a care leavers' guide to independence; and contributing to NSPCC research into the emotional well-being of looked after children. It has been more difficult to enable the majority of looked after children, who are placed outside the borough, to contribute meaningfully or to engage with elected members in their roles as corporate parents.

## 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 the welfare of care leavers is 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 in which widespread or serious failures create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm or result in looked after children or care leavers not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Section 2: The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

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

The arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children are good.

### What does the LSCB need to improve?

#### Priority and immediate action

There are no areas of priority and immediate action.

#### Areas for improvement

142. Ensure that the NSCB detailed dataset is rationalised so that priorities are more easily identified across the range of partner agencies.
143. Ensure that the NSCB monitors and influences the range and effectiveness of early help services effectively.

### Key strengths and weaknesses of the LSCB

144. Governance arrangements are good. A highly experienced and well-respected NSCB Chair meets the CEO, lead council members and the DCS regularly. Meetings include robust scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding work and the role of the NSCB. The Chair and other senior managers are actively engaged in the Children's Trust and the Health and Well-being Board. This enables the safeguarding of children to be prioritised and reported to each body. The work of the respective boards is demarcated well, with effective links, communication and synchronisation between them and their work plans.
145. The NSCB routinely monitors and evaluates safeguarding practice through its partner agencies and through its Performance and Quality Assurance sub-committee. This considers regular performance information, including audits and service reviews. It has begun to commission, undertake and evaluate multi-agency audits. These are based on practice issues identified by partners and on the NSCB's list of priorities. However, this extensive programme results in slippage in some of the work. A major multi-agency data report continues to be developed. Progress over the past year in analysing performance information has been significant, but multi-agency analysis of safeguarding practice needs to be more tightly focused.
146. Robust and objective multi-agency audits have been undertaken and have scrutinised both referrals and case conferences. They have benefited from external review, commissioned by the NSCB. This objectivity needs to be

maintained as the NSCB begins to develop multi-agency audits undertaken by its partners.

147. Partners increasingly hold each other to account. They receive reports routinely, as well as individual and multi-agency performance management information. These sources enable them to understand and evaluate how effectively they work, both individually and collectively, to safeguard children. They consider how well looked after children and other vulnerable groups are supported, such as those involved in criminal and gang-related activity. They capture the experiences of children and young people. A children and young people's group meets regularly to consider safeguarding issues and provides its views to the NSCB. This helps to inform partners' discussions on evaluating and developing safeguarding services.
148. The NSCB Chair facilitates discussion well. Partners use his authority effectively to challenge practice. For example, he recently ensured that an academy engaged in Section 11 audits, something that it had initially refused to do.
149. A wide and suitable range of partner agencies is actively engaged in the NSCB and its operational sub-groups. Attendance by almost all partner agencies is good, and there are arrangements for nominated alternatives or deputies to attend to provide continuity. Partners' engagement has greatly improved over the past two years. The Chair monitors attendance and challenges absence.
150. The probation service's engagement with the NSCB has significantly improved over the past year, particularly in developing MAPPA arrangements. This engagement needs to be sustained when the probation service is reorganised. The NSCB Chair is meeting key representatives of the new Offender Services to secure this. The partner agencies ensure their organisations give suitable priority to safeguarding and report to the NSCB.
151. Section 11 reports have been routinely undertaken and partners have followed up actions, overseen by the NSCB. Schools have been actively engaged in undertaking the equivalent of Section 11 audits. The NSCB has agreed protocols to promote their engagement. The NSCB rigorously tackled poor responses to Section 11 audits before 2012 by challenging and engaging partners. As a result, it received a good response from all statutory partners in 2013 to reviewing Section 11 audits. The response from the private and voluntary sectors was poor, however, and the Chair acted robustly to tackle this. These sectors now engage in the work of the NSCB and its sub-groups.
152. All NSCB key partners contribute funding proportionately to the NSCB and this finance is used effectively to underpin the Board's work. The NSCB has targeted funding to enhance specific areas of work, such as part-funding staff to develop training, improve data and engage with the faith sector.
153. The NSCB's learning and improvement framework has been recently reviewed and updated with key partners. A well-chaired and well-represented training sub-group develops and commissions a wide range of targeted, multi-agency training programmes. The NSCB part-funds a training development officer, who

has effectively reviewed, re-commissioned and expanded training. All the NSCB agencies support access to training within their organisations, overseen by the NSCB. A wide range of mechanisms enables NSCB partners to learn effectively from local and national issues, including learning from case audits, and single agency and multi-agency reviews. This learning is incorporated in flexible, responsive work programmes for the operational groups and in developing and delivering the NSCB's single- and multi-agency training. The Board has employed a range of qualitative measures to evaluate training, including observing it, and it has developed a new model to evaluate directly the impact of training on practice. The training development officer has recently begun to attend and quality assure the safeguarding training of individual agencies.

154. The NSCB's clear policies and procedures are based on Working Together and local pan-London procedures. These are reviewed regularly to reflect and incorporate local and national developments.
155. The NSCB has recently reviewed the guidance it gives to its partners and the community on help and protection for children and young people. Its guide to services is clear, well-presented and user-friendly. It provides a clear synopsis of the role and range of safeguarding services, as well as guidance on thresholds for accessing them. All the NSCB agencies that met inspectors understood the application of thresholds for safeguarding and protecting children locally. The NSCB was actively engaged in developing the multi-agency mash/triage service. It has also undertaken recent audits on referral and acted on the findings.
156. Through its sub-groups and through targeted training, the NSCB ensures that issues relating to missing children and children at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE) are understood and well-coordinated. The sub-groups have developed local plans, benchmarked against national and regional developments and enhanced by the NSCB Chair's well-established links.
157. Although the NSCB has received reports on aspects of early help, it has had little involvement in developing and monitoring these services. It does not have evidence to demonstrate the reach or impact of early help services on reducing the numbers of children in need of help and protection.
158. The NSCB's annual report provides a detailed analysis of the Board's work and local safeguarding issues. The draft report for 2013–14 is informative, clear and well-balanced. It identifies key developments, strengths and areas that require further development, demonstrating a sound understanding of the improvements achieved by the NSCB's partners and the challenges that need to be tackled. The findings have been incorporated into a specific, measurable work programme and plan for the Board. The NSCB Chair has secured commitment to a long-term strategic plan and framework for the Board, with a clear vision for future work. These need to be kept up to date and refreshed regularly to reflect emerging priorities.

## What the inspection judgements mean: the LSCB

An **outstanding** LSCB is highly influential in improving the care and protection of children. Its 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 its impact is evaluated regularly. 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 above characteristics.

An LSCB that is **inadequate** does not demonstrate that it has effective arrangements 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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