

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND  
PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS –  
20-6-2017 TO 13-7-2017**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To formally report the outcome of the inspection to Cabinet.

**2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The last Ofsted inspection prior to this one was in 2012, this inspection took place in June approximately 5 years since the last one. It was undertaken within the current program of inspections under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It involved a total team of 8 inspectors, six(6) Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), one(1) Ofsted Inspector (OI) and one(1) Senior Her Majesty's Inspector (SHMI). The process was quality assured throughout the process.
- 2.2 Inspectors looked closely at the experiences of children and young people, with the Ofsted inspectors looking closely at the quality of work and the difference staff make to children, young people and families. The Ofsted inspectors had full and unlimited access to electronic files for all cases within both social work and our family support services during this period.
- 2.3 The inspection was undertaken over a four week period, involved the inspectors reading case files, observing practice, talking to social workers, they also talked to children, young people and their families, they also tested how well North Lincolnshire Council recognised itself and its practice. The inspectors had full and unlimited access to social work and family support case management systems.
- 2.4 The inspections team also undertook a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.
- 2.5 Overall the inspection team made 7 Judgements, 6 in relation to services to children and 1 in relation to the review of the LSCB.
- 2.6 Children Services in North Lincolnshire were judged: **OUTSTANDING**

Children in need of help and protection	GOOD
Children Looked After and Achieving Permanence	OUTSTANDING
Adoption	OUTSTANDING
Experiences and progress of Care Leavers	OUTSTANDING
Leadership, Management and Governance	OUTSTANDING
Review of LSCB	OUTSTANDING

Ofsted Executive Summary: “ North Lincolnshire council has impressively sustained good and outstanding services for children and families since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. Its focus on keeping children and young people at the heart of everything is the most striking element of this outstanding local authority. The voice and views of children and young people are effectively sought and considered, in a range of creative ways to inform and evaluate strategic developments, and this is making a significant difference to their experiences. Effective direct work undertaken by a well-trained and stable workforce ensures that children are engaged fully, and this leads to measurably improved outcomes. This is evident across the full range of social work services.

Highly effective and principled leadership clearly models and articulates ambition for children in North Lincolnshire, and this is fully supported by a whole-council approach that prioritises children and ensures continuing investment and high-quality service provision. Continuity of exceptional leadership for children’s services, particularly the head of paid service and executive director, people and transformation (chief executive) and the director of children’s services (DCS) in current and previous roles, has been instrumental in embedding and sustaining a culture of child-centred excellence. A range of innovative approaches further secure best possible outcomes for children, including the development of a highly effective social enterprise model for the provision of accommodation and support for care leavers, PHASE (Pathways, Horizons, Accommodation, Support and Education).

There is very effective and coordinated partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. Comprehensive performance management and quality assurance systems, both within the local authority and across the partnership, ensure that accountabilities are firmly embedded, service effectiveness is well understood and areas for development and improvement are swiftly identified and progressed. There is a relentlessly strong culture of continuous learning and improvement within the local authority and across the partnership.

Services for children in need of help and protection are good. No children were found to be in situations of unassessed or unmanaged risk of significant harm. A wide range of good-quality and effective early help services ensure that children and families are supported at the earliest opportunity. Thresholds for services are well understood by partners and are effectively applied, and there is clear management oversight at the front door in the vast majority of cases. In a small number of cases, appropriate service decisions have not been made at that point, which has meant a short delay in children and families receiving the right service.

Prompt, well-coordinated and thorough responses were seen for children who are at risk of significant harm, and a highly effective reviewing service, with additional and creative oversight mechanisms, ensures the timely progression of plans to support children’s safety.

Multi-agency arrangements to identify, support and protect children at risk of child sexual exploitation and children who go missing are exceptional. Appropriate arrangements and services are in place to respond to homeless 16– 17 year olds. In a very small number of

cases where bed and breakfast was used for homeless young people, this was risk assessed, monitored and used for the shortest possible time. However, this accommodation should not have been offered as an alternative to the suitable accommodation available.

Services for children who are looked after are outstanding. A very high percentage of children looked after are placed within 20 miles of their homes and are living in high-quality in-house provision. This means that children benefit from a range of good and accessible services, which effectively support stable placements and demonstrably improve outcomes for them.

The educational attainment and progress of children looked after in North Lincolnshire, particularly at key stages 1 and 2, is impressive and compares favourably with national and statistical neighbours. The prompt availability of the high-quality child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) is a key element in ensuring that children's emotional well-being is effectively supported. The multi-agency corporate parenting board, which have clear links to and effective contributions from the Children in Care Council (CiCC), very passionately and effectively champions children looked after and care leavers and oversees and develops services for them.

Permanence is achieved for children in North Lincolnshire without delay, underpinned by comprehensive early planning, monitoring and reviewing. The adoption service is highly effective and valued, and there is a range of creative approaches supporting adopters, children and birth families in a timely way. An increasing number of children are achieving permanence through special guardianship orders. In a small number of cases, children were supported in the right placement for them, but the connected persons and special guardianship assessments had not been completed in a timely way.

The local authority is hugely ambitious and aspirational for care leavers, and the views of care leavers are central to all developments. The innovative approach to the provision of accommodation and support ensures that care leavers are effectively supported to secure and sustain their own tenancies. Significant investment and intensive support are highly effective in securing education progression and opportunities for future employment.

North Lincolnshire has been outstandingly effective in creating an environment where good social work is flourishing. A sufficient, stable, suitably experienced and skilled workforce is sustained, and social workers are overwhelmingly positive about working for the authority and the support and training they receive. Social workers have manageable caseloads that support highly effective engagement with children and casework of a consistently good quality. "

The full report is attached.

## **2 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 N/A

## **4 ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 N/A

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 N/A

## **6 OUTCOME OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

6.1 N/A

## **7 OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

7.1 N/A

## **8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That Cabinet notes the outcome of the inspection.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil**

# North Lincolnshire

## **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<sup>1</sup>**

Inspection date: 20 June 2017 – 13 July 2017

Report published: 4 September 2017

<b>Children's services in North Lincolnshire are outstanding</b>		
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>		Good
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>		Outstanding
	2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>		Outstanding

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

## Executive summary

North Lincolnshire council has impressively sustained good and outstanding services for children and families since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. Its focus on keeping children and young people at the heart of everything is the most striking element of this outstanding local authority. The voice and views of children and young people are effectively sought and considered, in a range of creative ways to inform and evaluate strategic developments, and this is making a significant difference to their experiences. Effective direct work undertaken by a well-trained and stable workforce ensures that children are engaged fully, and this leads to measurably improved outcomes. This is evident across the full range of social work services.

Highly effective and principled leadership clearly models and articulates ambition for children in North Lincolnshire, and this is fully supported by a whole-council approach that prioritises children and ensures continuing investment and high-quality service provision. Continuity of exceptional leadership for children's services, particularly the head of paid service and executive director, people and transformation (chief executive) and the director of children's services (DCS) in current and previous roles, has been instrumental in embedding and sustaining a culture of child-centred excellence. A range of innovative approaches further secure best possible outcomes for children, including the development of a highly effective social enterprise model for the provision of accommodation and support for care leavers, PHASE (Pathways, Horizons, Accommodation, Support and Education).

There is very effective and coordinated partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. Comprehensive performance management and quality assurance systems, both within the local authority and across the partnership, ensure that accountabilities are firmly embedded, service effectiveness is well understood and areas for development and improvement are swiftly identified and progressed. There is a relentlessly strong culture of continuous learning and improvement within the local authority and across the partnership.

Services for children in need of help and protection are good. No children were found to be in situations of unassessed or unmanaged risk of significant harm. A wide range of good-quality and effective early help services ensure that children and families are supported at the earliest opportunity. Thresholds for services are well understood by partners and are effectively applied, and there is clear management oversight at the front door in the vast majority of cases. In a small number of cases, appropriate service decisions have not been made at that point, which has meant a short delay in children and families receiving the right service.

Prompt, well-coordinated and thorough responses were seen for children who are at risk of significant harm, and a highly effective reviewing service, with additional and creative oversight mechanisms, ensures the timely progression of plans to support children's safety.

Multi-agency arrangements to identify, support and protect children at risk of child sexual exploitation and children who go missing are exceptional. Appropriate arrangements and services are in place to respond to homeless 16–17 year olds. In a very small number of cases where bed and breakfast was used for homeless young people, this was risk assessed, monitored and used for the shortest possible time. However, this accommodation should not have been offered as an alternative to the suitable accommodation available.

Services for children who are looked after are outstanding. A very high percentage of children looked after are placed within 20 miles of their homes and are living in high-quality in-house provision. This means that children benefit from a range of good and accessible services, which effectively support stable placements and demonstrably improve outcomes for them.

The educational attainment and progress of children looked after in North Lincolnshire, particularly at key stages 1 and 2, is impressive and compares favourably with national and statistical neighbours. The prompt availability of the high-quality child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) is a key element in ensuring that children's emotional well-being is effectively supported. The multi-agency corporate parenting board, which have clear links to and effective contributions from the Children in Care Council (CiCC), very passionately and effectively champions children looked after and care leavers and oversees and develops services for them.

Permanence is achieved for children in North Lincolnshire without delay, underpinned by comprehensive early planning, monitoring and reviewing. The adoption service is highly effective and valued, and there is a range of creative approaches supporting adopters, children and birth families in a timely way. An increasing number of children are achieving permanence through special guardianship orders. In a small number of cases, children were supported in the right placement for them, but the connected persons and special guardianship assessments had not been completed in a timely way.

The local authority is hugely ambitious and aspirational for care leavers, and the views of care leavers are central to all developments. The innovative approach to the provision of accommodation and support ensures that care leavers are effectively supported to secure and sustain their own tenancies. Significant investment and intensive support are highly effective in securing education progression and opportunities for future employment.

North Lincolnshire has been outstandingly effective in creating an environment where good social work is flourishing. A sufficient, stable, suitably experienced and skilled workforce is sustained, and social workers are overwhelmingly positive about working for the authority and the support and training they receive. Social workers have manageable caseloads that support highly effective engagement with children and casework of a consistently good quality.

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## The local authority

### Information about this local authority area<sup>2</sup>

#### Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates two children's homes. Both were judged to be outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was published in June 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was published in June 2012. The local authority was judged to be outstanding.

#### Local leadership

- The DCS has been in post since November 2016, having previously been assistant director.
- The DCS is also responsible for community resilience.
- The executive director, people and transformation, who was previously the DCS, has been in post since November 2016.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since 2011.
- The local authority has commissioned PHASE to provide accommodation and support to care leavers and young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless and are assessed by children's services to require accommodation and support. PHASE is a council-owned social enterprise.

#### Children living in this area

- Approximately 35,220 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in North Lincolnshire. This is 21% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 20% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
  - in primary schools is 14% (the national average is 15%)
  - in secondary schools is 12% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.

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

- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian and Mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
  - in primary schools is 11% (the national average is 20%)
  - in secondary schools is 8% (the national average is 16%).

### **Child protection in this area**

- At 19 June 2017, 911 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service.
- At 19 June 2017, 110 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 31 per 10,000 children).
- At 19 June 2017, three children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from nine at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years before inspection, one serious incident notification has been submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review (SCR) has been completed.
- There are no SCRs ongoing at the time of the inspection.

### **Children looked after in this area**

- At 19 June 2017, 212 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 60 per 10,000 children).
- 9% are placed more than 20 miles from their home address.
- 51 (or 24%) live outside the local authority area
- 10 live in residential children's homes
- no children live in residential special schools
- 178 children live with foster families
- eight children live with parents, of whom 13% live out of the authority area
- eight children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
  - there have been 14 adoptions
  - 15 children became subject of special guardianship orders
  - 95 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 6% subsequently returned to be looked after
  - 19 young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
  - no young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

## **Recommendations**

1. Ensure that screening and first-line management decisions about thresholds of need are of a uniformly high standard so that all children receive services that are well matched to their level of need and they do not experience delay.
2. Ensure the timely completion of all connected persons and special guardianship assessments.
3. Ensure that bed and breakfast is not offered as an option to homeless young people in circumstances in which they refuse more suitable accommodation.

## Summary for children and young people

- Services for children and young people in North Lincolnshire are among the best in England. Senior managers and elected councillors make sure that children are a top priority and that they can participate in and contribute to plans for their care and the services on offer.
- Social workers know the children that they work with very well and they make sure that their views are clearly considered when working with them and their families.
- There are a lot of services to support children and their families when difficulties start to arise, and this helps families to sort these out as soon as possible. Social work support should have been offered to a very small number of children more quickly.
- When children are seen to be at risk, social workers, police and other services work very well together to make sure that children are protected.
- When children are at risk of sexual exploitation or of going missing, all the services work very well together to make sure that children are supported to be safe.
- When children are looked after, they do very well. Most children live in foster care and are in or near to North Lincolnshire, and this means that they can still see their family and friends, and the services that support them can continue. Even when children live further away from North Lincolnshire, social workers, advocates, health staff and other services from the area continue to support them well.
- Children who are looked after by North Lincolnshire generally do very well in school, compared to other children looked after across the country.
- When children need to be adopted or live permanently with families other than their parents, social workers and their managers make sure that this happens as soon as possible.
- When young people leave care, they are very well prepared and supported to live independently, and their personal advisers make sure that they have the best chance to do well in their education, training or employment.

<b>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Services to safeguard children in North Lincolnshire are good. When children need a social work service, social workers work well to develop trusting and meaningful relationships with them. Children are at the centre of the work, their voice is strongly heard and they are effectively engaged in direct work, assessment and planning.</p> <p>When concerns are heightened, risk is addressed quickly and most children benefit from an effective early response. Children and their families have access to an extensive range of accessible and good-quality early help services, which support children and families at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Thresholds for services are well understood by partners and are consistently applied in the vast majority of cases. Children in need of a social work service, including children at risk of immediate harm, are identified and responded to well. Strategy discussions take place promptly, result in appropriate outcomes and benefit from the co-location of core partners. In a small number of cases seen, the screening and decision-making were not sufficiently effective to ensure the appropriate level of intervention, resulting in some delay in these children receiving the right service.</p> <p>Assessments of children’s needs and risks are consistently good. They are comprehensive and analytical, and social workers consistently use the underpinning risk assessment framework. This leads to plans that effectively reduce risk and are of good quality, focused and measurable. Child-friendly plans are developed for children who are in need of help and protection to help them understand their experiences and what this means for them and their family.</p> <p>Children at risk of sexual exploitation and children who go missing receive excellent support through coordinated multi-agency arrangements. Highly effective arrangements are also in place to manage children who are at risk from domestic abuse, parental mental ill health and substance misuse.</p> <p>The assessment and provision for homeless 16- and 17-year olds are appropriate and compliant with case law. In the very small number of cases where bed and breakfast has been used, the placements were risk assessed, there was daily support and monitoring, and they were used for the shortest possible time. However, this accommodation should not have been offered as an alternative to the suitable accommodation available.</p>	

## Inspection findings

4. Thresholds are understood well by partners and effectively applied through screening and initial responses in the vast majority of cases. There is clear management oversight with timely decision-making and direction, and children's wishes and feelings are effectively sought at the point of referral. Consent is well understood and sought correctly. In a small number of cases, the screening and decision-making were not sufficiently effective to ensure the appropriate level of intervention, resulting in not all risks being fully assessed for these children and, subsequently, some delay in their receiving the right service. (Recommendation)
5. When children are at risk of significant harm, responses are thorough, timely and well coordinated. There is effective information sharing between the police, health and education, which are co-located with children's social care. This enhances decision-making that is based on the most up-to-date and proportionate information available. Strategy meetings are consistently well attended by specific agencies that know the child best, and thresholds for section 47 enquiries are appropriately applied, proportionate and with clearly recorded actions for next steps.
6. There is a seamless 24-hour social work service. Inspectors saw timely and effective social work with responsive on-call management arrangements and the backup of additional staff should demand increase. Good communication with daytime colleagues and clear record-keeping ensure that children and their families receive a timely follow up.
7. North Lincolnshire provides a broad early help offer with a range of agencies involved in early help assessments (EHAs). Targeted work undertaken by the local authority, 'families are safe, supported and transformed' (FaSST) service is effective and underpinned by detailed planning in which risks and needs are well understood. Work undertaken by a wider range of early help providers is at the appropriate level of intervention and of sufficient quality to identify risks and strengths.
8. Engagement of children and young people is a strength. Social workers develop meaningful relationships with children, and changes in social worker are kept to a minimum. Social workers in their first year of practice are provided with a creative range of tools and methods to facilitate communication and direct work with children and young people. All social workers spoken to know their children well, visit them regularly and ensure that their voice is heard in assessments, meetings and plans.
9. In North Lincolnshire, children and young people matter. Children in need and those on a child protection plan have their own Cool KIDZ Club, a place for social activity, fun and meaningful consultation. Cool Kidz has consulted with children about what makes a good social worker, and is currently working with reviewing officers to produce information for children going to conference.

10. Child protection conferences are held appropriately and in time and are well attended by partner agencies. Strong and effective practice by the child protection chairs ensures a good focus on children's needs and effective engagement with and participation of parents and children. The service is exceptionally child and family centred, having developed an empathic and respectful pledge to families that find themselves in the child protection arena.
11. The reviewing officers hold local authority and other agencies to account for their practice with regular 'pit stop' meetings. Enhanced risk analysis meetings (ERAMs) held at the second review and then at three-monthly intervals monitor progress effectively between conferences and consider whether thresholds continue to be met. This ensures that plans remain meaningful processes for affecting change and that children do not remain on plans for any longer than necessary.
12. There is a well-established and well-used advocacy service. Where it is appropriate, children are supported by their advocate to attend their meetings or to contribute to them. The advocate completes a workbook before every conference, which details the children's views and supports their understanding of the process.
13. Overall, the quality of assessments is very good, and timescales for assessment completion are commensurate with the identified needs of the child. Social workers' consistent use of the risk assessment framework ensures a clear analysis of risk and protective factors, and these are further supported by the use of 'intelligent' chronologies, which contain an analysis of the significant events every three months. The child's voice is clear, and there is evidence of direct work being undertaken, and determined and successful efforts to engage significant adults, including males.
14. Children in need and child protection planning also effectively use the risk assessment framework to provide an overview of the risks and protective factors and a plan, which is simple and clear to understand. Timely progress was seen in addressing and reducing risk. Reviews are well attended, and multi-agency engagement is strong. Services work well together to deliver against the plan, and this helps to improve outcomes for children.
15. Arrangements for reducing risks for vulnerable children, including those children who go missing and who are at risk of sexual exploitation, are very effective. These are supported by mature well-managed partnerships. Senior managers regularly scrutinise interventions provided to young people considered as high risk at thorough multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) meetings. Timely and effective responses from the dedicated child sexual exploitation team ensure that support is offered commensurate with the level of need. The team builds relationships of trust through intensive direct work with young people, and this is central to its effectiveness in reducing risk. Specialist therapeutic interventions are readily available from commissioned services to complement that support to meet more complex needs.

16. Return home interviews conducted by independent advocates are timely, analytical and of good quality, which allows for clear safety planning. In the year to 31 March 2017, 92% of those children who went missing from home or care agreed to a return interview, and 78% of those interviews were undertaken within 72 hours.
17. The local authority has effective systems to track and report on children who go missing from education. Staff know the destinations of all children who have gone missing from education in 2016–17. There are effective links with other agencies and other local authorities to share intelligence on the movement of families and children.
18. When children are at risk through living in homes where there is domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse or parental mental health issues, formal multi-agency arrangements work well. The identification, intervention and management of significant risk and harm posed by adults are well managed within formal settings, such as the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). There is a range of services embedded in universal, targeted early help and statutory children's services, to support families who are affected by the toxic trio of concerns. Inspectors found an impressive understanding across the workforce of the complexities of working with domestic abuse, and social workers demonstrate a respectful effective challenge to parents.
19. Children who have disabilities receive an excellent service in North Lincolnshire. Assessments are thorough and support clear child-focused plans. There is effective multi-agency working that ensures that children's complex needs are met. Social workers are ambitious for their children and they know them well. Their work successfully balances an analysis of risk and enablement.
20. The recently strengthened designated officer arrangement has improved the oversight and scrutiny of allegations and concerns about professionals. There are clear systems and processes to record, review and track all enquires and ongoing investigations to ensure children's safety.
21. Those vulnerable young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless are promptly assessed, informed of their rights and entitlements and provided with a range of accommodation options by the social enterprise housing provider. Bed and breakfast accommodation has been used twice in the last year in line with young people's wishes, despite more suitable accommodation being offered. Risks of the bed and breakfast placement were considered and effectively monitored. (Recommendation)
22. North Lincolnshire has done much to ensure that effective and coordinated arrangements and responses to female genital mutilation are in place. There are currently no children or young people who have met the threshold for the 'Prevent' duty in the North Lincolnshire area during the past 12 months.

23. At the time of the inspection, a small number of children were in private fostering arrangements and, while they were safe and settled in their placements, these were not fully compliant with regulations. The local authority accepted this and swiftly remedied practice deficits in those cases during the inspection, which included assessing children of the household who were aged 18 and maintaining separate files for the carers. Private fostering policy and procedures were also appropriately amended, and dissemination methods to ensure practice improvements across the service were put in place.

<p><b>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</b></p>	<p><b>Outstanding</b></p>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The local authority is a highly ambitious and effective corporate parent, championing children looked after, care leavers and adopted children, and working very productively with partner agencies to ensure that these children receive outstanding services and that outcomes for children are good and improving.</p> <p>A very successful sufficiency strategy ensures that the vast majority of children who are looked after by North Lincolnshire live near to their families, friends and schools, and that disruption to their lives is minimised. Similarly, a very high percentage of children live in high-quality and well-supported in-house provision which, allied to highly effective multi-agency partnership services, means that stability in placements is good, crucially supporting positive outcomes.</p> <p>An effective virtual school ensures that the educational outcomes for children looked after are impressive, and better than those in similar local authorities, and that the emotional well-being of children is particularly supported by the timely accessibility of an effective CAMHS for children looked after.</p> <p>The strength of children’s views and voices is striking, both through the impact of the CiCC in strategic developments and in informing and shaping individual casework. High-quality social work underpins productive direct work with children, and an impressive advocacy service ensures that all children who become looked after are fully aware of their entitlements and it provides a regular and crucial link for all children who are placed out of authority.</p> <p>Permanence is achieved for children in North Lincolnshire without delay, underpinned by very effective management oversight and decision-making, early planning, monitoring and reviewing. The adoption service is highly effective and valued, and a range of creative approaches support adopters, children and birth families. An increasing number of children are achieving permanence through special guardianship orders. In a small number of cases, children are being supported in the right placement, but there has not been a timely completion of the connected persons and special guardianship assessments.</p> <p>An innovative approach to the provision of accommodation and support ensures that care leavers are effectively supported to secure and sustain their own tenancies. Good investment and intensive support are highly effective in securing education progression and opportunities for their future employment. The views of care leavers are central to service developments and improvement.</p>	

## Inspection findings

24. Effective work and services at the edge of care ensure that appropriate work is undertaken to support children to remain in the care of their families wherever possible and where risk is manageable. When families are subject to pre-proceedings work under the Public Law Outline (PLO), they are clear about what needs to change and by when. Regular management oversight of this work ensures that there is timely escalation to care proceedings if change is not achieved, and there is timely exit from the PLO process when improvement is evident.
25. When children are at risk of becoming looked after or when they become looked after in an emergency, immediate support is available from a dedicated team (FaSST). In a small number of cases, work to reunify children with their families immediately after a crisis was not successful, but risk was appropriately managed during the work and subsequent decisions for children to be looked after were appropriate.
26. Highly effective management scrutiny and decision-making ensures that no children who should not be looked after are looked after by North Lincolnshire, and this management oversight also supports effective early planning for permanence. For example, when children come into care as part of a planned move, this is well managed, such as children who have been the subject of a pre-birth assessment and placed directly from hospital with foster carers who plan to adopt them.
27. When children looked after return to live with their families as part of a planned move, these arrangements are managed well. Assessments, including risk assessments, are appropriately completed and the transition back to family is satisfactorily achieved, using placement with parent regulations appropriately.
28. Social work services delivered to children looked after are strong, and there is a robust care system. All children looked after are allocated to social workers who have manageable caseloads, and this allows social workers to get to know children well. A dedicated courts social work team delivers assessments and plans for court that are of a good quality, and there are very positive relationships between children's services, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the judiciary. The vast majority of casework is of a good or better quality. Assessments and plans are thorough, identify needs effectively and are up to date. Social workers are trained and confident in the delivery of direct work to children looked after. A toolkit of resources to support this work is of exceptional quality and means that children spend productive and appropriately focused time with their social worker.
29. The 'one placement' policy, means that a high proportion of children becoming looked after will stay where they are originally placed, receiving the services

that were initially identified to meet their assessed needs, and this has a very positive impact on the lived experience of the child looked after. The vast majority of children looked after are placed within 20 miles of their home. This means that most of them can maintain their own school, general practitioner (GP), leisure interests and friendship groups. Contact with their family is generally well planned, delivered and recorded by dedicated contact officers, and the evaluation of these visits is appropriately used to inform care planning.

30. The very small number of young people looked after who go missing or who are at risk of sexual exploitation are promptly offered a return home interview, and the learning is effectively used to inform care planning and to keep them safe. Young people looked after who offend, for example through sexually harmful behaviour, are offered a comprehensive multi-agency package of support through a very close working partnership with the youth offending services (YOS).
31. The voice, views and feelings of children looked after come through strongly and clearly in every aspect of their care. A culture of participation and advocacy is clearly visible at every level, such as in excellent arrangements for the CiCC, and its mature relationship with the corporate parenting board. All children becoming looked after receive a visit from the children's advocate to ensure that they are fully aware of their rights and support options. Every child looked after is allocated to an independent reviewing officer (IRO) who has caseloads that fall well within guidance, which means that IROs can keep in touch with and have effective oversight of children looked after between reviews. Reviews are generally timely and conducted effectively to ensure contributions from all participants. IROs ensure that children looked after are helped to voice their wishes and feelings about their care without barriers to communication.
32. The overall success of the sufficiency strategy means that 92% of children looked after who are fostered are placed within high-quality and well-supported in-house provision, and 98% are within 20 miles of their family home. This impressive achievement makes an outstanding contribution to the stability of children looked after in placement and meets the needs of most children looked after. When gaps occur because of specialist and complex needs, for example those of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the local authority targets recruitment of new foster carers and trains existing in-house carers. When placements are commissioned externally, robust procurement processes ensure that they are appropriate to the assessed needs of children looked after. The local authority is a member of the White Rose procurement partnership, which enables placements generally to be local. Through robust management tracking processes, senior leaders have recognised that a very small number of disruptions are having a disproportionate effect on placement stability, and they have accurately identified this vulnerable cohort as their current priority for improved commissioning. Learning from this analysis has already led to improved

training for foster carers in anticipation of potential problems when children reach adolescence.

33. Children's needs are exceptionally well met locally by an appropriately focused range of high-quality support services. Support packages can be very swiftly drawn together, as almost all of the partnership's in-house services are local to where the child is living. For instance, timely initial health assessments are completed, and this enables effective monitoring of improved health outcomes for children looked after.
34. One particularly positive aspect of support to placements is the readily available service from a dedicated and responsive CAMHS for children looked after. A wide range of support services are available according to assessed need, such as the counselling or independent visiting services offered by a national charity, the YOS, or the family nurse partnership. The range and accessibility of services available to support placements is strong, and children looked after generally thrive in care.
35. Children looked after are routinely offered a high-quality advocacy service. In particular, the service ensures that all children looked after who are placed out of area receive a minimum of four visits per year, to ensure ongoing links with and oversight of these most vulnerable children. Several services continue to visit young people placed out of area, even at a considerable distance, further enhancing the continuity, links with and quality of support from North Lincolnshire.
36. The educational achievement, attainment and progress of children looked after in North Lincolnshire are very good. The local authority has restructured its access and inclusion service effectively to increase the capacity of its virtual school, to improve the educational outcomes for vulnerable children, including children looked after. As a result, the local authority is now better placed to monitor the attendance of children looked after, track their progress and work with schools more effectively to follow up actions agreed in personal education plans (PEPs).
37. Children looked after make good progress in their education, particularly at key stages 1 and 2. At both these key stages in 2015–16, a higher proportion of children looked after in North Lincolnshire reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics than their counterparts in similar authorities and in the rest of the country. The gap in attainment between children looked after and their peers in North Lincolnshire is much narrower than it is in other local authorities.
38. At key stage 4, the average attainment of children looked after is lower than that of their counterparts in the rest of the country. However, the rate of progress that they make from their starting points is higher. The proportion of children looked after in this age group in North Lincolnshire who have special educational needs is very high.

39. The quality of PEPs has been improved by their recent transfer online, and these are now a highly effective means for planning the education of children looked after. They contain challenging but realistic attainment and personal development targets, and they assign clear accountabilities for actions, which staff from the virtual school monitor assiduously.
40. Currently, the vast majority of children looked after attend schools that are judged to be good or better. Rates of attendance of children looked after are very high and are among the best in the country. The head of the virtual school and her staff have been highly effective in working with schools to reduce the percentage of children looked after who receive fixed-term exclusions.
41. Achieving permanence for children looked after is given high priority. Decision-making and progress are tracked from the earliest possible stage, so that children do not experience drift and delay. Plans for permanence are promptly identified before or very soon after children become looked after and are subsequently endorsed at children's second statutory reviews.
42. There has been a significant increase in the number of children achieving permanence through special guardianship in the last year, resulting from an increased focus on and improvement of services to special guardianship arrangements. This is further supported by timely and thorough viability assessments, and children looked after move to live with connected carers only when this is judged to be safe and appropriate. While children are safe and appropriately placed, in a small number of cases special guardianship and connected persons assessments have not been completed in a timely way. (Recommendation)

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

43. The adoption team offers a service that is highly effective, forward thinking, sensitive, increasingly timely and child focused, and the support offered to children and adopters throughout their adoption journey is valued and is a real strength.
44. Achieving permanence through adoption for children is a high priority in North Lincolnshire. Comprehensive permanence planning and consideration of adoption begin at the earliest possible stage, and concurrent and twin tracking planning ensures that children do not experience drift and delay. Decision-making and progress are effectively monitored, further supporting timely permanence.
45. North Lincolnshire has shown continuous improvement in the average timescales for children entering care and moving in with their adoptive

families. Current published national data indicates that North Lincolnshire is performing better than national and statistical neighbour averages, ensuring that children are placed with their permanent family as soon as possible. When there has been a decision to move away from adoption for a very small number of children, this has been appropriate and permanence has been achieved through other means.

46. The adoption service has increased the number of children being adopted from the previous year and has been particularly effective in placing children aged over five, and brothers and sisters together. There has also been effective and successful use of early permanence adopters (foster to adopt). When it is not appropriate, or no adopters are identified in North Lincolnshire, children are matched and placed either regionally or nationally in a timely way. Currently, only a small number of children are waiting to be adopted, and all these children have families identified or are awaiting further court outcomes.
47. Arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters are highly effective and timely. The needs of children likely to be considered for future adoptions are effectively addressed through targeted recruitment strategies. There are effective and timely assessments of adopters in line with national requirements, and the service is responsive and sensitive to the needs of the adopters within the process. Prospective adopters are encouraged to give feedback to the service at every stage, which is then used to further enhance the service provided.
48. Extensive packages of easy-to-access training and a comprehensive library are available to adopters. Adopters said that they value the courses provided to support their parenting. The training and resources offer is based on feedback from children and adopters, as well as from adoption social workers. Packages are matched to adopters' needs, which are assessed through the selection process, and to support ongoing placements. Creative methods are used to ensure that service information is available appropriately. For example, when adopters requested more information on the pupil premium usage in schools, the service held a successful information event and, following on from this, the service is now holding 'hints and tips' sessions on a variety of different issues that affect adoptive families.
49. The agency adviser is meticulous in the quality assurance of children's permanence reports, providing detailed and constructive feedback to the authors. This ensures that the information and language used is child focused and thorough, and will be informative and sensitive in later life. This is combined with the training offered to social workers by the adoption service, to ensure that the quality of reports is consistently good. The prospective adopters' reports and matching reports contain detailed relevant information, and there is a clear, well-informed analysis of prospective adopters' strengths and any vulnerabilities. At the adoption panel, the members ask well-documented questions to ensure that they base their decisions on clear and

correct information. Training events, organised by the panel chair and agency adviser for the panel members and the adoption and fostering teams to share good practice, take place twice a year. This supports good-quality practice and communication.

50. Well-attended and highly valued child appreciation events are held for all children prior to children being introduced to prospective adopters. These draw together a wide range of professionals, carers and significant people in children's lives to give information, to tell stories and to give a real sense of the children who may be placed with them. These events are recorded in a very sensitive, detailed and child-focused way, to support children's understanding of their journeys in later life.
51. Preparation and planning for the child's transition to the adoptive family are thorough, sensitive and effective. Adopters reported that children are prepared well for adoption by their foster carers and their worker, and, in some cases, the foster carers have remained friends of the child's family. The move to adoption is marked and celebrated.
52. Impressively effective and responsive adoption support is offered in a variety of creative ways, dependant on need. The evidence of effectiveness is that there have been no adoption breakdowns involving North Lincolnshire adopters over the last two years. The support ranges from formal individualised support plans, based on a comprehensive assessment, to regular adopters' informal support meetings and an annual event celebrating adoption. Adopters and children spoken to by inspectors stated, for example, 'You can always speak to someone who will listen and help you.' Adopters also spoke of the invaluable support that they receive from 'buddying' arrangements that put them in touch with other adopters who have experienced similar circumstances. Learning from an adoption breakdown, involving carers who were not from North Lincolnshire, has led to enhanced adoptive parenting sessions being held on a one-to-one basis with all new adopters, to help and support them in the early stages of placement. When more intensive support and therapeutic intervention are needed by children or adopters, CAMHS or other specialist provision is sought and provided in a timely way.
53. Movingly, all children spoken to had life story books and memory boxes that they cherish. These are of good quality and contain all relevant information. Children, where appropriate, have ongoing contact with brothers, sisters and birth families. Age-appropriate direct work to help children to understand their histories and form secure attachments to their new families is a significant strength of the service and evident at every stage of the adoption process.
54. Sensitive work takes place with birth parents to support their children's transition to their new families. The adoption service holds a birth parent support group four times a year, enabling the sharing of experiences and

ongoing support for the future. Sensitive 'settling in' letters, written by birth parents, effectively support children's emotional well-being.

55. A highly successful adopted children's group is very well attended and has over 22 members. The group provides an excellent opportunity for adopted children to enjoy friendships and to seek support from others who understand their lived experience. The group is well supported by the adoption social workers and a committed older adopted young person who shares her experiences to help support the younger members. In addition to this, up to seven younger children attend a monthly stay and play session, offering a supportive environment to these children and adults to discuss adoption issues.
56. Social events take place for other children within the adoptive family to give them space to discuss their feelings and to make friendships with children who understand some of the issues they face. They also provide an opportunity to get to know the adoption workers so, if in the future they need additional support, the workers will be familiar to them.

**The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is outstanding**

57. The experience and progress of care leavers in North Lincolnshire are outstanding. The local authority has high ambitions for and develops the aspirations of all its care leavers. Strong levels of corporate commitment and sustained investment ensure that care leavers receive intensive support to improve their chances of progressing to further education and future employment. An innovative approach to the provision of accommodation gives care leavers plenty of opportunities to secure and sustain their own independent housing. The views of care leavers are central to service developments and improvements. The local authority is in contact with the vast majority of its care leavers. The rate of contact compares very favourably with that of similar local authorities in the rest of the country. Care leavers seen by inspectors all spoke positively about the support they receive from their social workers and personal advisers, for example, 'The support is always there when you need it.' Most of them stated that they would not have achieved what they have without the constant encouragement and reassurance of care leaving staff.
58. Care leavers receive effective advice on the dangers associated with risky behaviours and about how to keep safe. The local authority has been very effective in engaging care leavers in the design and development of leaflets and videos on child sexual exploitation, how to stay safe on line, body imagery and the impact of bullying. Personal advisers and support staff carry out risk

assessments on all the accommodation in which they plan to place care leavers. As a result, care leavers who were spoken to stated that they feel safe where they live.

59. All care leavers receive a detailed health passport when they turn 18, which contains information on their health conditions, their immunisations and the contact details of the doctors and dentists. Medical support from the children looked after doctor and nurse continues after the care leavers' 18th birthdays. Care leavers have good access to advice on sexual health and drug and alcohol use. Referral onto accessible support services is timely and effective.
60. Care leavers develop good independent living skills. Support workers draw up bespoke plans for each care leaver to address their specific needs. A central feature of this work is support on the management of tenancy agreements and the cultivation of the disciplines needed to make a tenancy sustainable, such as budgeting, negotiating with landlords and maintaining accommodation to an acceptable standard. Support workers also help care leavers to conduct job searches and prepare themselves for interviews.
61. The local authority has been highly innovative in the way it secures accommodation and provides support services for its care leavers. It has established a social enterprise, PHASE, from which it now commissions all of its accommodation for care leavers. PHASE has increased the range of housing options, so that it is now possible for a care leaver to move up a ladder of different types of accommodation before reaching a fully independent tenancy. It is about to expand its provision further to open up new training and retail facilities where care leavers can develop their employability skills.
62. The very great majority of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. The number of care leavers who remain with their foster carers when they turn 18 has increased. Young people in residential care in the local authority-run provision can 'stay close' by moving into supported accommodation in the same complex, a move for which they are thoroughly prepared and which they find highly reassuring.
63. As part of its range of accommodation, PHASE has a complex of flats and houses for young parents, the majority of whom are care leavers. The aim is to help young parents to develop their parenting skills, and, where there are concerns about their ability, to care safely for the baby. They are given the best possible support and opportunity to achieve this. The proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment in North Lincolnshire is much higher than that in other parts of the country. This is due to the early focus that staff place on developing the career aspirations of vulnerable children in secondary school, and the identification of and support for those who are at risk of not securing a positive destination when they turn 16. As a result, progression rates into further and higher education are high among care leavers.

64. The local authority and its partners have developed a good range of work-experience opportunities to enable care leavers to develop their employability skills and sample potential career opportunities. These include an increasing number of apprenticeships and internships for those care leavers who have complex needs.
65. Pathway planning is effective. Personal advisers and support workers have a good understanding of the needs of their care leavers and are skilled at harnessing a range of local resources to support them. However, the pathway plan itself is not a helpful document to support planning. This has been recognised, and care leavers are currently engaged in work to improve its effectiveness.
66. Care leavers are confident that the local authority will respond to their concerns, both formally through consultations and more informally through frequent contacts with personal advisers and support workers. The local authority seeks and acts on the views of its care leavers. BIZZ, the formally constituted care leavers' group, regularly meets with senior managers and councillors to suggest ways that services can be improved, most of which are implemented.
67. Care leavers are fully aware of the grants and support available to them when they move into independent accommodation and when they continue with their further and higher education. As one care leaver stated, 'I wouldn't have completed my degree without this support.' The local authority provides care leavers with free passes into all of its local leisure facilities. It regularly celebrates the achievements of its care leavers through awards evenings and through presentations to the corporate parenting board.

Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Strong, committed and effective leadership by the DCS and his senior team is well supported by a whole-council ownership and prioritisation of children’s welfare, and there is tangible pride in and celebration of children’s achievements. There is committed political support expressed through continued investment in maintaining and enhancing a broad range of appropriately focused services to meet the needs of children and families. As a result of this, leaders and managers have been influential in ensuring that good and outstanding outcomes for children are sustained. Many services are innovative and model best practice, such as the effective PHASE service for care leavers.</p> <p>Very impressive engagement with and listening to children and young people at a strategic and casework level are particular strengths. The local authority is a highly effective corporate parent. It is ambitious for children looked after and is particularly well engaged with the active and influential CiCC.</p> <p>Highly effective leadership by the local authority is central to ensuring the strength of multi-agency working. Work to protect children from sexual exploitation and the risks from going missing and to enhance their emotional well-being is particularly impressive. However, while the local authority works well with the LSCB, its own internal arrangements for scrutiny by elected members are less robust.</p> <p>A strong framework for performance management and quality assurance supports workers and managers to monitor performance and helps senior managers to have a clear line of sight to the quality of frontline practice. This means that areas for development are generally swiftly identified and action is taken to ensure progress.</p> <p>First-line management decision-making and oversight of practice are strengths that are positively influencing the quality of practice in almost all cases. However, for a very few children, managers’ threshold decision-making is not consistently well matched to presenting need, and this causes delay for children receiving services that fully match their needs.</p> <p>Social work flourishes in North Lincolnshire. Social workers were overwhelmingly positive about working for the council. They are part of a sufficient, stable and suitably experienced and skilled workforce. They have manageable caseloads and access to a good range of training and regular supervision. As a result of this, the local authority has created an environment in which good practice can thrive and in which social workers can build effective and consistent relationships with children. This in turn is supporting the achievement of good and excellent outcomes for children.</p>	

## Inspection findings

68. Strong, steadfast and visible leadership by the DCS and senior managers has been exceptional in creating a culture within the local authority that is both child focused and committed to continual improvement. As a result of this, leaders and managers are influential in shaping innovative practice and improving the outcomes achieved by children and young people, for whom they are highly ambitious. This commitment to engage with children at all levels is exemplified by the well-embedded children's feedback forms, the learning from which is used to shape services at both an individual and a strategic level. There is consistent use of individual, child-friendly plans to help children understand the nature and purpose of the services they are receiving.
69. The executive director, people and transformation, has a detailed understanding of, and commitment to, the local authority's work with children. She has been pivotal and resolute in developing and embedding 'whole-council' ownership of this work. At a political level, this backing is expressed through ongoing investment in maintaining and enhancing services for children. This has ensured that there is an impressive range of well-focused and resourced services available. The leader of the council and the lead member for children have a comprehensive knowledge of how well services help and protect children and young people. The lead member chairs the local authority's corporate parenting panel and the multi-agency children and young people's partnership (CYPP), observes every LSCB board meeting and meets regularly with children in a variety of fora.
70. The executive director, people and transformation, holds the independent chair of the LSCB to account for the good running of the board through a detailed annual appraisal and makes effective use of the 'critical friend' role of the board through regular meetings with the independent chair, the lead member for children and the DCS. However, the local authority's own arrangements for scrutiny by elected members, while appropriately constituted, would benefit from a sharper focus and challenge on outcomes for children to ensure that the quality of outstanding services continues.
71. Highly effective leadership by the local authority means that partner agencies have a strong and shared commitment to joint working and to children. This is exemplified by the CYPP and the clear and well-focused North Lincolnshire Children's Strategy 2020, which outlines the partnership's role and ambitions. Both the CYPP and the strategy are driven by feedback from, and the active engagement of, children and young people. The CYPP is consistently attended by children's and young people's representatives from bodies, including the youth parliament, youth council and CiCC. Children and young people's views are gathered in a variety of ways, but of particular importance is the role of lifestyle surveys that engage a broad range of children within different age bands. Alongside local and national information on demographics, services for children and the outcomes they achieve, learning from these surveys also provides a foundation for the local joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA). The

most recent adolescent lifestyle survey was completed in February 2017, and there was a high level of responses from a range of schools and settings. Historically, the JSNA, although well focused on wider public health issues, has lacked a sufficiently sharp focus on the safeguarding needs of the most vulnerable children. The introduction in 2016 of a vulnerable children and young people supplement has substantially addressed this concern. In addition, a refresh of the JSNA is currently under way, to further improve its content. Children's views are well used at this multi-agency level, to shape the services they receive, for example in the content and presentation of information about emotional well-being and related topics in the 'Life Central' website and application (app), developed as part of the ongoing CAMHS transformation strategy.

72. Arrangements for both local authority and multi-agency commissioning are particularly strong. A clear strategy and productive engagement with health agencies and other partners mean that commissioning activity clearly reflects local priorities for children. Good alignment between subject experts and commissioning managers, impressive child engagement in monitoring and co-production and effective management of clear service specifications mean that the range and quality of commissioned services are well matched to need and are continually reviewed to provide further improvement. For example, the commissioned drug, alcohol and substance misuse service for children and young people prioritises services for the most vulnerable, including children looked after, care leavers and those at risk of sexual exploitation. It has a dedicated youth offending service worker and routinely offers sexual health screening. To ensure continuous development, the service specification contains not only key service details and performance measures but also an annual development plan based on new and emerging priorities, such as tackling the use of 'legal highs' and 'spice'.
73. Multi-agency working is exceptionally effective in tackling the risks to children and young people from sexual exploitation and going missing from home or care. The needs of and risks to these children and young people are overseen by a clear and well-joined-up system of strategic and operational meetings, including regular, very well-attended MACE and missing children meetings. The missing children advocate and local authority operational lead for child sexual exploitation each attend both meetings, to ensure a good join-up between these two areas, as does a senior education lead, to make sure that information is also shared about children missing education and those whose attendance is poor. The decisions of MACE meetings are routinely recorded in children's electronic case files and are well integrated with wider planning for them. This has resulted in swift, coordinated and effective interventions for children who go missing and an ongoing reduction in the number of children assessed as being at risk of sexual exploitation. Overall, these approaches have had a very positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.
74. Information and intelligence sharing between the police and the local authority and the subsequent profiling and analysis of risk are exceptional.

This supports very high-quality awareness raising, prevention and disruption work, including the successful prosecution of offenders and the use of child abduction notices and sexual harm prosecution orders. Targeted work includes group-work with children in hotspot areas and work with licencing and fire and rescue services, to support the closure of premises. Broader awareness raising and prevention include mandatory training and a bi-annual exam undertaken by all licensed drivers, information and discussion sessions in schools and the well-publicised 'Not in our community' social media campaign.

75. The local authority is a highly effective and proud corporate parent. It acts as a champion for children looked after, care leavers and adopted children, for whom it provides outstanding services. The corporate parenting board, led by an effective lead member and well supported by the multi-agency looked after children's partnership provides strong leadership and governance, particularly with regard to the successful sufficiency strategy. As a result of this, children looked after in North Lincolnshire are more likely to live nearer to their families, friends and schools and are more likely to enjoy long-term stability in their foster homes than children looked after in similar local authorities.
76. Accommodation for care leavers is commissioned from the local authority-initiated social enterprise, PHASE. PHASE provides an increasing range of good-quality accommodation and support and has opened up new training and retail facilities where care leavers can develop their employability skills. The active and influential CiCC has sub-groups for children of different ages and is one of a number of groups in which children looked after and care leavers are well engaged. This engagement is a key driver for the development of services, such as short films that the CiCC has developed for helping teachers understand the particular needs of children looked after and for developing the skills of foster carers to support children who go missing.
77. The framework for monitoring, analysing and improving the quality and performance of services is well considered and mature. There is an effective framework of meetings and a range of good-quality performance and audit reports. This supports social workers and first-line managers, for example through electronic team white-board displays of 'real-time' case progression and regular compliance reports. It also means that senior managers have a clear line of sight to the quality and impact of frontline practice and can take action when improvement is necessary, for example in the timeliness of court work and the stability of children's placements. The local authority has a detailed overview of the quality and impact of its own early intervention FaSST teams. First-line management decision-making and oversight of practice are strengths. Managers consistently oversee all key decision-making points for children. This is well recorded in case records, which show how clear direction by managers, for example at the start of child protection investigations and assessments, is positively influencing the quality of work in almost all cases. However, during the course of the inspection, inspectors saw that, for a very few children, threshold decisions made by first-line managers

about the level of services that children receive are not always proportionate to children's levels of need. This was particularly seen within the new single access point (SAP). Although this has not resulted in any children being left at risk of significant harm, it has meant that a small number of children have been left in situations in which risk has not always been sufficiently assessed or they have experienced some delay before receiving the services that their needs warrant. The local authority has been monitoring and developing the work of the SAP since its recent launch and, through a shared focus on neglect with the LSCB, is taking action to improve the ability of its staff to recognise risk to children when it comes from a chronic pattern of harm rather than from a single acute incident. When, during the course of the inspection, inspectors identified any areas of relative weakness, such as in the quality of services for privately fostered children, the local authority took swift and effective action to address these.

78. Through its highly successful workforce strategy and approach to training and developing its staff, the local authority has ensured that it has a sufficient, stable, experienced and suitably skilled workforce. At 31 March 2017, 74% of social workers had more than three years' post-qualification experience, while annual turnover stood at 11%. This is an impressive achievement. Social workers and other staff have manageable caseloads and access to a broad range of good training and learning opportunities, and have regular supervision. Social workers told inspectors that they feel well supported and that managers at all levels are visible and approachable. There is a strong support package to protect and develop the skills of social workers who are in their first post-qualification year of practice. The principal social worker has been important in driving this learning culture and in ensuring that training and development are well linked to learning from performance and quality management. As a result of this, the local authority has created an environment in which good practice can thrive. This in turn is supporting the achievement of good and improving outcomes for children.

## The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

### The Local Safeguarding Children Board is outstanding

#### Executive summary

North Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board is outstanding.

The board is outward looking and constantly striving to improve the effectiveness of its agencies in safeguarding children. The board partnerships are exceptionally strong, with comprehensive representation, commitment and a healthy culture of challenge. The board chair is highly visible and formidable in holding partners to account.

The LSCB is highly influential in informing planning and services for children and families. Priorities for the board are very well aligned to those of other strategic boards and appropriately informed by performance data, auditing and research.

The significant strength of the board is the power of the voice of the child in influencing practice, service delivery and training. This ensures a clear focus on what it is like to be a child in North Lincolnshire.

The effectiveness of the board is further enhanced by the safeguarding operational management (SOM) group and the newly formed safeguarding pathways lead officer group (SPLOG). They provide robust oversight and an important link between the strategic board and frontline practice.

The LSCB effectively promotes a culture of continuous learning and improvement. The work of the board is significantly enhanced by the comprehensive training programme, which reflects the priorities of the board to increase the effectiveness of frontline practice, to improve outcomes for children and families.

There is a strong and embedded culture of performance management, supported by comprehensive data and robust auditing processes, to ensure that board members have a clear understanding of key issues for children and areas for improvement.

The board is well served by the lay member who has a clear understanding of her role and is vigorous in her challenge, especially of issues of diversity. The lay member takes an active role in auditing and has led training on female genital mutilation.

## **Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board**

79. The LSCB is highly influential in informing planning and services for children and families. The LSCB is proficient at driving and shaping the ways in which local services work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Priorities for children are clear and comprehensively informed through auditing processes, performance information, local and national intelligence, learning from SCRs, child death overviews and, most importantly, from children. The impact of the board is clearly seen through developments such as the neglect strategy, domestic abuse triage systems and the highly effective multi-agency responses to child sexual exploitation.
80. Strong governance arrangements combined with effective direction from a highly effective and experienced independent board chair ensure an unremitting focus on safeguarding children. The chair is very influential and maintains a high profile across the partnerships. This ensures good communication, information sharing and opportunities for challenge. Importantly though, it is clear that it is the commitment from board partners that sustains the effectiveness. The business management arrangements for the board are strong and effectively support the various groups and working arrangements.
81. Partnership representation is very strong, and there is consistent commitment and a healthy culture of challenge to drive forward the work of the board. Priorities are well aligned to the key strategies of partner agencies, including the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and the CYPP. The chair maintains a high profile with these and other partners, including the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Neighbourhoods Executive Board, and attends meetings ensuring good communication and opportunities for challenge.
82. The LSCB proposed priorities for 2017–18 are aligned to the key strategies of partners to safeguard children. The priorities continue to focus on reducing harm from child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and neglect. To further improve the effectiveness of services, the business priorities include the introduction of outcome-based accountability within the performance management framework.
83. The overwhelming strength of the board is the voice of the child in the development of services, influencing practice and contributing to the learning and development of all agencies working with children. This ensures a clear focus on what it is like to be a child in North Lincolnshire. The voice of the child is evident in all areas of the work of the board, such as learning from SCRs, whereby a group of children, dedicated to promoting positive emotional well-being and mental health, produced the 'positive steps' leaflet and organised a conference to raise awareness for children and professionals. Children have also been at the forefront of the development of and creation of

the North Lincolnshire Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Transformation Plan.

84. The significant effectiveness of the board is enhanced through the SOM group and the newly formed SPLOG. These groups ensure robust oversight and contribute to the development of key areas of practice and to strategic planning. The focus of SPLOG comes from the findings of audits, performance data and other intelligence and has already resulted in effective changes in practice, for example in strengthening the arrangements for the management oversight of re-referrals and identifying training needs in health settings with regard to domestic violence procedures and services. SPLOG priorities further inform the multi-agency audit agenda, looking at the key pathways for children, which for this year are particularly focused on thresholds. While thresholds are clearly defined and understood by partners, information and data have identified the need for a renewed focus to ensure that thresholds are applied consistently, to ensure that children receive the right services at the right time to meet their needs.
85. The SOM group provides a valuable forum with good links between the strategic board and frontline practitioners. The group has a focus on key areas of practice, to improve the effectiveness of partners in North Lincolnshire through the development of policies, identification of training needs and dissemination of research and good practice. The SOM group is particularly good at ensuring that all professionals working with children and families are consistent in their practice and use a common language to ensure clarity for children and families.
86. The extensive LSCB training programme is underpinned by a comprehensive learning and development framework. The programme reflects the priorities of the board to increase the effectiveness of frontline practice to improve outcomes for children and families. The framework and training programme is informed by research, case audit processes, SCRs, partner agency needs analyses and child death reviews. Robust evaluation processes ensure that the training programme is clearly focused on the needs of partners to deliver effective services. The impact of training is measured through case audits to consider the application of theory into practice and the difference that it is making. When interviewed by inspectors, professionals working with children had a good knowledge and understanding about LSCB training, including learning from SCRs. The learning and development coordinators are passionate, demonstrating a very strong commitment to ensuring the wider dissemination of training across the partnerships.
87. Engagement with schools is highly influential through annual conferences promoting the safeguarding agenda. There is excellent engagement with children to develop some exceptionally good training tools to raise awareness of hard-hitting messages about child sexual exploitation through 'skater boy story' and 'Fern's story'. Training is also disseminated through street pastors and multi-faith groups and to night-time economy services, ensuring that

information and awareness about important issues, such as child sexual exploitation, reach the widest possible audience.

88. The comprehensive performance data and highlight reports provided to the board ensure that board members have a clear understanding of key issues for children in North Lincolnshire from which to identify areas for development across the partnerships. For example, the most recent report identifies key areas to consider in respect of the understanding and application of thresholds and has resulted in this area of work being identified at SPLOG, to be taken forward as part of the auditing programme.
89. All partners are highly committed to the section 11 auditing processes of the board to evaluate individual effectiveness. The LSCB has a well-established process in place to measure compliance with section 11 duties. This involves annual themed challenge events at which each agency presents an annual report and each representative has a one-to-one challenge interview with the chair and a selected panel on their contribution to and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
90. The LSCB multi-agency case evaluation process and line of sight meetings and reports enable partners to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding services and quality assure practice to determine the impact of interventions for children and families. The arrangements for multi-agency case auditing have been further strengthened, and all board members and practitioners have been included in the processes. Case audits have resulted in changes to strengthen frontline practice, for example in the development of domestic abuse triage systems.
91. The SCR group has appropriate representation to meet its statutory functions. The learning from the last SCR is well developed and has resulted in changes to practice and wider developments across the partnerships, and beneficial coordinated work with other agencies.
92. The child death overview panel (CDOP) is appropriately constituted and works well. The panel has effectively taken forward issues relating to suicide and emotional well-being. This has contributed to some very valuable and successful work in improving and developing responsive services and in involving children in the development of child-friendly information, such as the 'let's talk about it' tool for practitioners to identify and engage with children when talking about emotional well-being and mental health.
93. The board is very good at ensuring a focus on child sexual exploitation. Mature information and intelligence sharing about child sexual exploitation, children missing education and missing from home or care, support targeted awareness raising, prevention work, disruption and the prosecution of offenders. The board has focused on the auditing of children's cases in which child sexual exploitation was a factor and has received detailed information through regular line of sight meetings.

94. The board also receives detailed reports to inform its wider safeguarding role, on key areas of practice. These include private fostering, IRO annual reports, managing allegations against people who work with children and, importantly, detailed reports on some of the most vulnerable children, including disabled children and those living out of the area.
95. Responses to female genital mutilation are an ongoing priority of the board. Responses are robust. Each partner agency has identified a safeguarding lead, provision of specialist training, clear guidance and procedures and ensures that awareness of female genital mutilation is raised across communities.
96. Extremism is considered well by the LSCB through direct links to the 'Prevent' duty multi-agency partnership board. This enables the board to ensure that all organisations have an awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and the various forms that radicalisation takes, so that practitioners are able to recognise signs and indicators of concern and respond appropriately. Awareness training includes professionals and children. Awareness is further promoted through a local college's involvement in a Department for Education training pilot, which is to be adopted nationally in the summer of 2017.
97. The annual report 2015–2016 is a highly informative succinct document, clearly linked to outcomes for children. It includes an excellent executive summary and evaluation of the effectiveness of the board in carrying out its statutory functions and the effectiveness of multi-agency practice to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## **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 includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people whom 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 six of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, one Ofsted inspector (OI) and one senior Her Majesty's Inspector (SHMI).

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