

South Tyneside

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

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Children's services in South Tyneside are good		
1. Children who need help and protection		Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence		Good
	2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
	2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance		Good

¹ Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and 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

Senior leaders in South Tyneside are ambitious and have been effective in securing swift improvements to the quality of services for children and families. The senior leadership team has systematically and comprehensively addressed shortfalls identified in the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) in February 2016, and outcomes for children in need of help and protection and children looked after are improving and are now good. Now that statutory compliance is met, the local authority is appropriately focused on securing consistently high-quality services for all children.

The chief executive is resolute in his ambition to provide outstanding services for children in South Tyneside and has recruited a senior leadership team that shares his ambition. The director of children's services (DCS), who took up post in 2016, has taken a systematic approach to improving services for children. The pace of change is impressive and there is demonstrable impact in relation to a range of outcomes for children. Senior leaders have ensured that staff development and support have been prioritised effectively, and staff morale is good. The workforce is stable, motivated and child-focused. Social workers have access to a comprehensive range of flexible and responsive training and development. Social workers know their children well and they undertake sensitive and creative direct work. However, management challenge is not consistently robust, and although social workers receive regular supervision this is overly focused on compliance rather than addressing areas where the quality of practice could be improved.

Multi-agency partnerships are strong and dynamic. There is a shared understanding of the vision for children and families, and this is leading to the effective management of risk and appropriately focused service provision. The response to children who are at risk of sexual exploitation and domestic abuse is rigorous, reducing risks to the most vulnerable children effectively. A wide range of early help and targeted services are utilised to support children and families.

While some services have rapidly improved, there are missed opportunities to use intelligence effectively in relation to return home interviews and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). While appropriate action is taken to safeguard children, information shared is not consistently translated into planning for individual children or always used to inform the broader strategic response.

There is an effective multi-agency response to children in need of help and protection. Children's needs are assessed promptly and thoroughly, and risks are identified, reduced and reviewed regularly. However, the use of written agreements with parents, particularly where domestic abuse is an issue, is not reducing risks to children in some cases. Contingency planning is not consistently specific or meaningful to parents.

Children become looked after when they need to be so. Outcomes relating to children's health and education are good. Effective matching is supporting placement

stability well and this is good. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) offer effective oversight, review and challenge of children's cases, and this is leading to timely permanence. Foster carers are well trained and supported to meet children's needs, although not all carers are provided with timely delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions for the children they care for. The local authority has recently taken action to improve oversight of this service, and this includes improving the timeliness of foster carer reviews.

Adoption services are outstanding. Children are benefiting from permanence plans at the earliest opportunity. The service matches and supports children and families effectively. Life-story work is creative and beautifully presented for each child, helping them to understand their life journey.

Services to care leavers are good. Recent improvements to the service have ensured that personal advisers (PAs) have time to concentrate on and support care leavers well. Young people know their rights and have good access to health services, and the quality of accommodation is good. The proportion of care leavers aged 16 to 19 years who are in education, employment and training is well above the national average. However, this is not replicated for care leavers aged 19 to 21 years, and the proportion here is well below the national average. The response from the local authority and corporate parents has been slow to address this issue, but firm plans are now being implemented.

Children's engagement and participation in shaping services are an ongoing area of focus for leaders. Advocacy is not well used, and the council is not monitoring children's use of the complaints process effectively. The service is not using learning to inform service developments effectively.

Corporate parents have not provided sufficiently robust challenge to the local authority and partners when services are not achieving good outcomes for children, for example in relation to care leavers aged 19 to 21 who are not in education, employment and training.

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The local authority

Information about the local authority area

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates two registered children's homes. Both were judged to be good in their most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children was published in June 2013. The local authority was judged to be adequate.
- 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 good.

Local leadership

- The DCS has been in post since March 2016.
- The DCS is also responsible for adult services, public health and commissioning.
- The chief executive has been in post since January 2010.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has been in post since September 2015.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 29,511 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in South Tyneside. This is 20% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 28% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 22% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 21% (the national average is 14%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 7% of all children living in the area, compared to 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British and mixed.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 6% (the national average is 21%)
 - in secondary schools is 5% (the national average is 16%).

Child protection in this area

- At September 2017, 1,166 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,367 at 31 March 2016.
- At September 2017, 196 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 66 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 182 children (60 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At September 2017, one child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is unchanged from one at 31 March 2017.
- In the two years prior to inspection, seven serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and two serious case reviews have been completed.

Children looked after in this area

- At September 2017, 276 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 94 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 275 (93 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2017.

Of this number:

- 115 (or 42%) live outside the local authority area
 - 36 live in residential children's homes, of whom 86% live out of the authority area
 - one lives in a residential special school out of the authority area
 - 204 live with foster families, of whom 38% live out of the authority area
 - 20 live with parents, of whom 5% live out of the authority area
 - no children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 26 adoptions
 - 13 children became subject of special guardianship orders
 - 112 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 1% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 12 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 in multiple occupation.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that all staff receive challenging, reflective and directive supervision that addresses the quality of practice and planning for all children effectively.
2. Ensure that all children are actively engaged in return home interviews and that the intelligence is consistently used to reduce individual risk and inform strategic planning.
3. Ensure that all children's plans clearly reflect current circumstances and offer clear contingency for children and families; and that written agreements with parents reduce risks to children effectively where domestic abuse is a concern.
4. Continue to work with partners to increase the numbers of care leavers aged 19 to 21 who are in education, employment and training.
5. Continue to improve the engagement and participation of children and young people through providing accessible advocacy services and ensuring that children and families know how to complain and that any learning is used to inform service developments.
6. Ensure that foster carers are provided with more timely delegated authority in order to undertake their role.
7. Increase the impact of corporate parents on holding services to account by ensuring that the voice of children is heard more clearly.

Summary for children and young people

- Services for children in South Tyneside are good. This is because managers and social workers try their hardest to make sure that services are the best they can be. Sometimes, extra help is needed to make sure that children are safe. When this happens, everyone works closely together to make sure that this happens quickly. Social workers, police, health professionals and schools work together well so that children can get the right help at the right time.
- Social workers listen carefully to what children tell them and understand what they need to do to help. This includes providing extra support for parents and carers. Children and young people told us that they have good relationships with their social workers. The social workers write good assessments about what needs to change.
- If children have to leave their families, social workers make sure that they live with people that will care for them and help them to be healthy and do well at school. Social workers need to be clearer with foster carers about what decisions they can make without having to ask parents. When it is safe for children to go back home, they are helped to do so with lots of support to make it work.
- Children and young people have the right to speak to someone called an advocate who is independent of their social worker, and to have access to an independent visitor if they would like one. If there are concerns about the quality of services, then young people and their families need to know that they can make a complaint. The local authority needs to do more work to make sure that children can have their say.
- For children who are unable to go home, social workers help to find another family or another place for them to live. Social workers try very hard to make sure that they can find the best family for them to live with.
- Young people who leave care still have the support of an adviser who will continue to help them when they need it, and to ensure that they live in safe accommodation. PAs develop excellent relationships with young people. They work extremely hard to make sure that care leavers feel safe and happy and are supported in college or work. Care leavers aged 19 to 21 need more help to get into work, training or college. Although most of their health needs are met quickly, some young people wait too long to see health specialists to support them with their emotional well-being. PAs and social workers make sure that they keep in regular contact. They help care leavers work on skills that they need to live on their own, such as managing money and cooking.
- Care leavers told inspectors about a very small number of things that they would like to see improved. For example, two care leavers said that they would like more help to understand their childhood and to see their files more quickly when they ask for them.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Children in need of help and protection in South Tyneside are protected through effective multi-agency working in the Integrated Safeguarding and Intervention Team (ISIT). Thresholds are understood and well applied to ensure that children receive the right service at the right time. Children and their families have access to a range of accessible and good-quality early help services, which support them well when problems first emerge. The early help offer is developing, and further improvements have recently been made to the effectiveness of the lower-level response and coordination between early help services and children’s social care.</p> <p>When children are at risk of immediate harm, a quick response ensures that they are protected and that risk is reduced. Child protection strategy meetings and enquiries involve wide multi-agency representation to inform robust decision-making, and decisive actions are taken to protect children.</p> <p>Children have their needs assessed promptly, and assessments are mostly of good quality. This leads to plans that reduce risk and are regularly reviewed to monitor progress, although contingency plans are not always clear for families, and some children’s plans are not updated between reviews when additional risks are identified. Social workers and family workers undertake direct work with children, which is often creative and is sensitively undertaken to inform assessment and care planning. The response from the out-of-hours service is robust and effective, working seamlessly with day services.</p> <p>The multi-agency response to children at risk of domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation is rigorous and provides effective support. A multi-agency project, which builds on learning from a successful police-led operation, is having a positive impact on reducing risk for children. Social workers demonstrate an understanding of domestic abuse, although at times there is an over-reliance on written parental agreements, which places unrealistic expectations on the victim.</p> <p>All children reported missing from home are offered return home interviews, but further work is needed to encourage more children to engage so that the information gathered is of sufficient quality to inform individual and strategic planning. The local authority tracks children who are missing from education effectively to ensure that they are safe, and children who are educated at home are well monitored.</p> <p>The assessment of and provision for homeless 16 to 17-year-olds is prompt and highly effective. Good partnership working across supported accommodation providers ensures that young people are offered suitable housing and ongoing support that meet their needs.</p>	

Inspection findings

8. The arrangements to help and protect children in South Tyneside are effective. When concerns first emerge, children and their families benefit from a good range of early help services. Following a recent review of early help services, there is improved coordination of provision through the multi-agency allocations team, and this is ensuring a responsive offer of support for families. The early help assessments seen by inspectors were of good quality. Plans are appropriately focused on improving outcomes for children and families, and this includes some proactive work with fathers.
9. There is a good understanding by partner agencies of the thresholds for access to children's social care, which means that the majority of referrals are appropriate and timely. Effective screening within the recently introduced multi-agency ISIT ensures a prompt and proportionate response to risk. This includes high-risk domestic abuse concerns and facilitates timely assessments and interventions. Consent is well understood and applied appropriately. The number of children living in households in which neglect is a feature is significant in South Tyneside. The graded care profile has recently been introduced to help social workers identify when a child might be at risk of neglect, although it is too soon to assess the impact of this.
10. When children are at risk of significant harm, responses are thorough and well coordinated. This includes the out-of-hours social work service, which provides a seamless and robust response to children, with effective communication between daytime and evening services.
11. Multi-agency representation within ISIT is a particular strength. Strategy meetings are well attended. Comprehensive information-sharing between partners and effective identification of risk and protective factors is leading to good-quality decisions. Actions taken to protect children are robust and appropriately focused.
12. Child protection conferences are timely and well attended by partner agencies, which results in well-informed multi-agency decision-making. Some children attend their conferences when it is appropriate for them to do so, and their voice is heard effectively through the consultation process. However, advocates are not well used. Robust monitoring of plans by the child protection chairs ensures that children do not stay on plans for too long, and appropriate action is taken when circumstances do not change to protect children, although contingency planning is not always specific or meaningful to parents. (Recommendation)
13. Social work assessments are generally of good quality and identify well the presenting needs and risks. They make good use of historical information. However, the impact of identity and diversity is not consistently well considered. This includes the different needs of younger children. An

understanding of the cumulative impact of domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and substance misuse is not well articulated. This means that, for some children, services are not as appropriately focused as they could be.

14. Children in need of help and protection are seen regularly and their views are clearly understood and recorded. Social workers are knowledgeable about the children they work with and use creative tools to carry out some effective direct work to better understand the child's lived experience. Family workers are offering effective support alongside social workers and are having a positive impact on improving children's and family's outcomes.
15. The majority of children's plans are well focused and responsive to changing needs through regular review. Partner agencies contribute well. However, some plans are overly adult-focused, are not updated when further information is known and lack timescales to facilitate robust monitoring of progress. Newly introduced plans are starting to help social workers to better articulate to parents the areas causing concern and what needs to happen next, but it is too soon to see the impact of this in all cases.
16. Management oversight and supervision are regular but are not offering consistently good challenge about the quality of social work practice. There are missed opportunities for a small number of children for whom decisions could have been taken earlier to instigate protective actions.
(Recommendation)
17. When concerns for children are escalated or situations for children do not change, pre-proceedings letters very successfully make the expectations clear for families about what they need to do to make the required changes.
18. Services to meet the needs of children who have disabilities are responsive and effective. A recent restructure has ensured more manageable caseloads, and this has supported the development of meaningful relationships with children and families. Assessments are well written and child-focused, with a clear consideration of the impact of the child's disability in the context of the whole family.
19. Children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation receive a well-coordinated multi-agency response through the Missing, Sexual Exploitation and Trafficked (MSET) group. Risks are identified and social workers and managers take appropriate action to protect these children. However, this is not always updated in the existing care plan, which reduces the holistic understanding of the child's needs. The local multi-agency project Sanctuary South is particularly effective in helping to reduce harm safely. Inspectors saw examples of extremely positive intervention and support, which has enabled successful disruption and a significant reduction in the risk for several young people.

20. For children who go missing from home, return home interviews are always offered but are not consistently taken up. There is further work to do to ensure children's better engagement. When interviews take place, information is of a poor quality and is not being used effectively to inform individual or strategic planning. (Recommendation)
21. There are robust arrangements in place for children missing from education. A named manager coordinates children missing from school effectively. Effective and clear procedures are in place to support children who are home educated and their families. Currently, 68 children are being electively home educated. Each registered family is visited twice a year, when the progress of children is assessed, guidance and support are offered and alternatives suggested if this is appropriate.
22. There are effective arrangements for the identification, intervention and management of significant risk and harm by adults within the multi-agency public protection arrangements. However, for children living in families in which there are higher levels of risk from domestic abuse, the response from partners through the MARAC is not always translated effectively into children's individual plans. While action is taken to protect children, this means that a holistic view of the child's experiences is, in some instances, not clear. The use of written agreements between parents is not always reducing risk, as there is sometimes an over-reliance on the adult victims to protect children. (Recommendation)
23. The assessment and provision for homeless 16 to 17-year-olds is prompt and highly effective. This is supported by a single access point. Emergency accommodation is available when needed. Good partnership working across supported accommodation providers ensures that young people are offered suitable housing and ongoing support that meet their needs.
24. Private fostering arrangements are suitably assessed and supported, although the current number of children in South Tyneside remains very low despite a range of suitable awareness-raising activity being available.
25. The management of allegations against professionals working with children is robust. The majority of investigations are tracked and monitored effectively by designated officers. Regular training, awareness-raising and supportive conversations with other agencies have all had an impact on the reduction of inappropriate referrals.
26. South Tyneside is an area where the occurrence of female genital mutilation is low, but much has been done to respond to and raise awareness of the issue.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Decisions for children to become looked after are based on a comprehensive assessment of risk and need, and are appropriate and, for the vast majority, timely. Children enjoy positive and purposeful relationships with their social workers and the people who care for and support them. Permanence for children is well promoted. Children are placed with well-matched carers who meet their needs effectively. The majority of children live in stable and good-quality placements, although not all carers are provided with timely delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions for the children they care for. The local authority has recently taken action to improve oversight of this service, including improvements in the timeliness of foster carer annual reviews.</p> <p>Children’s participation in their looked after reviews is strong. IROs are very effective in their roles. Some children have access to an independent advocate, and when this offer is taken this is effective and not time-limited. However, take-up of advocacy is low. The local authority is in the process of reinvigorating the service. Proactive and purposeful partnership work by the virtual school ensures that children looked after progress and achieve well educationally. The health needs of children are identified and supported well.</p> <p>Risk to children looked after who go missing and are at risk of sexual exploitation is well understood and responded to. However, sufficient effort is not always made to ensure that return home interviews take place and are of appropriate depth to inform individual or strategic planning.</p> <p>Adoption services are outstanding. Children with a plan for adoption are identified early, prepared well to live with their adoptive families and benefit from permanence without delay. The highly skilled team carefully prepares and supports adopters through high-quality assessments, preparation training and post-adoption support. Children progress well in their adoptive homes.</p> <p>Services for care leavers are good. Young people live in safe and supportive housing and are well supported. While the majority of care leavers aged 16 to 19 are in education, employment and training, too many aged 19 to 21 are not, and even though they are supported the impact of additional ‘workplace’ services is yet to be seen.</p> <p>The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a well-engaged team of young people who work hard to connect with and seek the views of children looked after. It has an increasing voice on behalf of children looked after in South Tyneside and is starting to have a positive impact on shaping services.</p>	

Inspection findings

27. Children who are on the edge of care receive effective support to help them to remain at home when it is safe to do so. Family workers provide intensive support to enable children to remain safely with their families. They provide evidence-based parenting support, direct work and intensive support programmes. The local authority has identified a need to strengthen edge of care services, and has very recently implemented a targeted edge of care service for children aged 10 to 15 years. The full impact of this is too early to assess.
28. Appropriate decisions are made for children to become looked after in South Tyneside. These are based on comprehensive assessments of risk and need. Consistently applied thresholds for care result in the right children becoming looked after. Social workers are attuned to the children they work with. They see them regularly and understand their personalities and individual needs. Inspectors saw examples of sensitive direct work and engagement with children, helping them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences. Social workers maintain regular direct contact with children and see children alone, so that positive and purposeful relationships can be nurtured.
29. Legal permanence for the majority of children is secured in a timely way. Effective tracking systems are in place to monitor timely progression of children's cases through the Public Law Outline (PLO). This process ensures that delays are reduced and are well understood, and service managers monitor this weekly to reduce unnecessary delay. Delays are in the main due to court scheduling. Working relationships between the local authority, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the judiciary are well established and very positive. Social workers produce good-quality, thorough assessments and reports for the court. These ensure that legal permanence for children is achieved without delay.
30. The local authority supports children being cared for by their birth families effectively, where this is possible and it is assessed as safe to do so. Connected persons and special guardianship assessments are balanced and evaluative and carefully weigh analyses of strengths and vulnerabilities. A clear evaluation of applicants' capacities to safeguard children and to provide nurturing parenting throughout their childhoods is evident.
31. The vast majority of children are placed in stable, good-quality placements that meet their needs. Children do not experience unnecessary moves and there is generally a good range of placements available, sourced and managed by the commissioning team through a well-established regional commissioning framework. A review of placements is under way, and service redesign is taking place in response to recognised shortfalls in the sufficiency of placement choice for family groups and older teenagers who display

challenging behaviour. This is being progressed by targeted advertising and recruitment.

32. Careful consideration is given to placement suitability for children who have complex needs. The correct choice of placements has contributed significantly to reducing risk of child sexual exploitation and missing episodes. Placements that can meet the diverse needs of children have resulted in children making positive progress in a range of areas of their lives.
33. Foster carer assessments are comprehensive and evaluative with recommendations for best potential matching. Foster carer reviews lead to clear personal development plans. However, not all reviews are completed in a timely manner, and this is not conducive to ensuring that placements continue to meet children's needs. A dedicated reviewing officer has recently been appointed to address this shortfall. In addition, not all carers are provided with timely delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions for the children they care for, and this reduces their ability to make timely decisions for children. (Recommendation)
34. Contact with family and friends is appropriate to the child's needs and is well supported. Contact plans are clear, fully discussed with foster carers and are reviewed if foster carers report any adverse reactions or behaviours following a contact visit. This consistency and attention to detail ensures that contacts remain appropriate and positive for children.
35. There is currently limited capacity to undertake life-story work in the fostering service, and some children have been waiting a long time for this work to start. The local authority recognises this and has plans in place to address it. When it takes place, life-story work is creative and effective. Examples seen by inspectors show considerable evidence of multiple strands of evidence being gathered to ensure that all of the child's history is captured.
36. Most children looked after who are living outside the area live in neighbouring local authorities and are relatively close to their homes. Children who are placed a distance away are placed for the right reasons and in their long-term best interests. Social workers visit these children regularly, and their communication with the children and care providers is good.
37. Strong working relationships across agencies are evident and contribute to achieving good outcomes for children. There is good multi-agency attendance at key meetings, and information-sharing is timely and effective in influencing children's plans. Access to services and support is readily available to children. Children who live out of area and those placed at home receive an equitable service.
38. Children are returned to parents' care when it is safe for them to be so. This is informed by comprehensive assessments ratified at the child's looked after review. Children's views are well recorded and effective direct work is

undertaken with them and their families. The majority of children have a detailed plan to support their return home.

39. Risks associated with going missing and child sexual exploitation are well understood. When children go missing from their placement, including out of area placements, the police are alerted in a timely way and appropriate information-sharing takes place. However, sufficient effort is not always made to ensure that return home interviews take place and are of appropriate depth to fully inform plans. Children who are being exploited or who are at risk of child sexual exploitation have multi-agency plans to reduce the risk and these are regularly reviewed. (Recommendation)
40. Children looked after who offend benefit from a well-coordinated response to meeting their needs, underpinned by regular communication between social workers and youth offending service officers.
41. The educational progress of the 186 children of school age is prioritised and scrutinised effectively by secure governance arrangements, which means that the virtual headteacher is regularly challenged and the service is held to account. The current cohort of children attend 84 different schools, the vast majority of which (90%) are good or better. A very high proportion of pupils have additional learning needs and these are being well supported.
42. A well-established and highly effective virtual school team, the Project for Looked After Children's Education (PLACE) proactively tracks, monitors and supports all young people, including care leavers, up to the age of 18. Personal education plans (PEPs) are used well to focus its work, which is firmly rooted in supporting children's educational progress, particularly those experiencing emotional difficulties, trauma and loss. The pupil premium is being used well to ensure one-to-one provision where necessary and access to a counselling service for pupils who need it.
43. The impact of the work of PLACE means that the vast majority of pupils are attending school regularly and attendance rates are high at 97%. Pupils are generally making expected levels of progress in line with their peers. Attainment is mostly in line with the national average for children looked after in the majority of key attainment and progress indicators. A very small number of pupils have had a fixed-term exclusion during the last year. Very few pupils have moved schools other than in normal transition periods. This is because PLACE places a high priority on school stability, and children are only moved in exceptional circumstances.
44. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that when young people are not attending school full-time they receive high-quality alternative provision that meets their needs. A suitable range of provision is available for young people to access across the borough when it is clear that mainstream schooling is not suitable or they have been temporarily excluded. Currently, five pupils who

are in care are accessing this provision. The local pupil referral unit, the Beacon Centre, provides the majority of places along with the local college.

45. The health needs of children looked after are given early careful consideration when they enter care and are routinely addressed in case planning. Children have access to a variety of commissioned services. Foster carers have direct access to psychological advice to promote attachment and placement stability. Children's initial and review health assessments are completed for the majority in a timely way. A lead professional is identified for children whose health assessment indicates that additional support is required. Initial access to child and adolescent mental health services is in line with the national average but can take some time. However, once carer and child are receiving a service, the response is highly valued.
46. The quality of assessments is generally good. They are clear and comprehensive and inform children's plans. However, the assessed needs of children who remain looked after are not always updated periodically or when a child's circumstances change. Sensitive responses to children's individual needs are evident in care planning. A high significance is placed on the enduring relationships between brothers and sisters, and they live together if their needs determine that this is appropriate. Children also have good access to an independent visitor who is matched according to the child's requests.
47. Children's reviews are timely and effective. Almost all children participate in their reviews in some way, and their wishes and feelings are carefully considered in care planning. IROs visit children between reviews, when possible. They apply rigour in their role and are effective in ensuring that care plans progress in a timely way and meet children's needs. Care plans are not always of consistently good quality. However, the majority address the needs of children well. The IROs escalate issues appropriately on behalf of children looked after. Social workers and managers are receptive to and value professional challenge from the IROs, and this has on occasion resulted in appropriate amendment of care plans.
48. All children have the right to access an independent advocate, and when this offer is taken this is effective and not time-limited. However, take-up of advocacy is low and under-promoted. The local authority is in the process of reinvigorating the service. (Recommendation)
49. The CiCC, MAGIC (Making A Great Important Change), is a well-engaged group of young people who work hard to connect with and seek the views of children looked after. They are active in the region to increase greater consistency of opportunities for children looked after. Children at MAGIC said that they feel listened to and are enabled to make a difference, which makes them feel good about their contributions. Children in care in South Tyneside can now access free leisure passes, with an additional free pass being available for a friend or their carer. The CiCC has an increasing voice on behalf of children looked after and is starting to have a positive impact.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is outstanding

50. The performance of the adoption service is excellent and the local authority continues to seek ways to improve its service. Children who need an adoptive placement are identified early and benefit from permanence without delay, and 67% are placed with adopters in under 14 months, which is much better than the national average of 47%. The authority has been highly successful in ensuring that harder to place children are adopted. The 2016 adoption scorecard demonstrates that the proportion of Black and ethnic minority children and children aged five and over who ceased being in care due to adoption is more than twice the average national levels.
51. Family-finding is robust and social workers demonstrate tenacity and success in finding families for children who have diverse and complex needs. Fostering to adopt and parallel planning are well established and secure excellent outcomes for children. Support for this challenging type of pre-adoption work is outstanding, and there is evidence of adoption workers being available overnight and at weekends. Creative use is successfully made of national activity days, adopter-led matching and regional consortium exchange days.
52. Matching is a strength and all efforts are made by the adoption service to secure the right household for each child. Evidence was seen of tenacious and creative work to secure an adopter for a child who has complex needs. Brothers and sisters are placed together whenever this is possible, and independent assessments are commissioned early in their care experience when the collective nature of their needs may give rise to the question of separation. The adoption panel is stable and robust, providing a sensitive forum for prospective adopters to present themselves. Good consideration is given to the planning for provision of support services if a child is to be placed away from the local area. The agency decision-maker has detailed knowledge of children's circumstances and makes timely, appropriate decisions. Medical advice is thorough, valued and readily available to both panel and prospective adopters.
53. Management oversight of the service is well informed and very effective. In 2016–17, 11 children had their plans for adoption changed. Each case has been individually reviewed by the agency decision-maker and service managers to maximise learning and to assure themselves that decision-making and care planning, both within the authority and in external bodies, such as the court, are appropriate.
54. Managers track the progress of children with an adoption plan from the earliest possible stage to plan ahead, and this avoids drift and delay. Child placement reports are good in the majority of cases and action has been

taken to raise standards further. Work remains to be done to ensure that all attain that degree of quality.

55. Adopters are overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from the service, and many apply to the authority as a result of the positive experiences of others. A comprehensive training package is available for prospective adopters. Preparation covers areas such as child development, abuse, legal issues, attachment, contact and positive parenting. Good-quality and relevant training is offered post-placement, ensuring that adopters continue to have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of their children. To ensure that children's views about their adoption experiences are known and understood, a DVD of them was produced and is to be used in training for potential adopters and the corporate parenting panel.
56. The focus is on supporting adopters in an effort to achieve the very best outcomes and standards of care for children. An example of this is the use of the adoption support fund to secure a much-valued clinical psychologist whom adopters can access with ease and without delay from pre-placement until their adopted child is an adult. This results in challenging behaviours and attachment issues, both at home and in school, being addressed as they arise, and there have been no placement disruptions in the last 12 months.
57. Adoption support was provided to 13 families in the last year, and support ranged from therapy sessions for children, attachment training for adopters to a 'Talk Adoption' summer camp for children. However, adoption support plans have historically been too variable in quality, and in July of this year managers took action to remedy this by auditing all active plans and identifying necessary improvements.
58. The 'After Adoption' service, provides effective services for adopted people aged over 18, and birth parents, who are seeking advice, information and counselling. Quarterly reports demonstrate the sustained use and positive impact of this service.
59. Adopted children and their families benefit from high-quality life-story work. A specialist worker is extremely skilled at not only building sensitive and factual accounts of children's lives but supporting and guiding adopters in how to use them to best effect with their children. Later-life letters are clear and well written, describing the child's journey and the decisions made about them in a very sensitive manner.

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

60. Care leavers are well supported by their PAs who are committed and persistent, especially with those young people who are more difficult to

engage. As a result, they know and are in touch with all of the 118 care leavers currently using the service. As one care leaver put it, 'My worker was brilliant and especially when I was going through a difficult time. He helped me get my apprenticeship, which I absolutely love.' A recent reorganisation of the team has enabled the personal advisers to concentrate on their work with care leavers. This is having an impact on developing a more professional approach to the work. As a result, work is focused and ensures that care leavers are both supported and challenged to help them make positive choices and keep them safe.

61. Young people spoken to by inspectors have a well-developed understanding of their rights and entitlements. A care leavers' resource pack was developed in collaboration with MAGIC. However, the pack needs to be more interactive, engaging and accessible, so a web-based resource is planned by MAGIC. PAs ensure that young people are kept informed about the range of help that is available, including financial support.
62. Pathway plans are current, up to date and regularly reviewed. The plans are helpful and support young people in making successful transitions and increasing their independence. All of the plans reviewed by inspectors were of good quality. Plans are detailed, generally evaluative and record some useful historic information about the young person's journey through care. Targets are appropriate and realistic and include input from the young person. This means that for the vast majority, pathway planning helps care leavers to review what is going well, to prioritise areas they need to focus on and to take responsibility for their actions. Care leavers spoken to for the inspection confirmed that they find the pathway planning process helpful.
63. A small number of care leavers spoken to by inspectors said that they would like more work done to help them understand their childhood experiences and early histories. Plans are in place to develop high-quality later-life letters and life-story work when these are not in place. This will help care leavers to reconcile their childhood experiences and build resilience. However, at present, care leavers are waiting too long to access their files.
64. Young people have consistent and good support to develop independent living skills. For example, PAs work with them to make sure that they have bank accounts, a national insurance number and passports. When care leavers move into their own property, they are supported effectively by accommodation partners in developing daily living skills including budgeting, paying their rent and utility bills, shopping and cooking for themselves. If care leavers have lived in residential homes, outreach staff continue to work with them once they move out. A number of care leavers have received financial support for driving lessons, particularly when they need to drive because of their employment. This means that, for the vast majority, their transition to adult life is positive and they feel well supported.

65. For those care leavers who have additional needs or a disability, very effective planning is in place to ensure that they continue to receive well-tailored support into adulthood at a level that is appropriate for them. For example, when necessary, fostering arrangements continue and become 'shared lives' placements so that young people can remain with the same families. When appropriate, adult social care takes the lead to ensure that care and support are seamless with few, if any, disruptions.
66. Care leavers' physical health needs are addressed effectively through the work of the PAs and wider health partners. Particularly good attention is paid to advising them about alcohol and drug use and other risky lifestyle choices. All care leavers are provided with a health passport that ensures that important information about any health issues is recorded and available for future reference. Young people have good access to specialist sexual health services and, in some cases, have developed a very trusting relationship with the sexual health nurse working in the team. When young people become parents, they are well supported by community health services and through children's centres to ensure that their own health and that of their babies is well supported.
67. Care leavers have appropriate access to a variety of services to address their emotional well-being. The 'Life Cycle' service is available for those young people who have mild to moderate mental health concerns and issues about anxiety. Care leavers are responded to promptly. The PLACE has recently appointed a counsellor for children looked after and care leavers, but take-up of this new service is low at present. For those young people who have more complex mental health needs, referrals are made via their general practitioner to the community treatment team. Recent improvements in this service are ensuring a prompter response for those care leavers over the age of 18. However, some young people spoken to by inspectors feel that they have waited too long, and some are still waiting for an appropriate service.
68. A wide range of housing options is available to care leavers to ensure that they are well supported to move into suitable accommodation that meets their individual needs. The weekly Housing Allocation Pathway Planning and Support group enables all referrals for accommodation to be responded to promptly. Once a referral is made, young people are offered options that range from highly supported living arrangements to those with less support including who have their own tenancies. Care leavers are given priority in the bidding process for council tenancies. These seldom break down, as young people are encouraged to take the next steps in a timely way to suit them.
69. A very small number of care leavers feel that the area they are currently living in is unsafe. They have raised this with their workers and moves are already planned. Inspectors visited these properties during the inspection and were satisfied that these young people are housed safely. As one young person said, 'The area is OK, not the best but not the worst.'

70. Increasingly, care leavers are offered the opportunity to stay put with their foster carers. The five care leavers currently attending university are able to return to their previous foster care placements, or alternative accommodation can be provided during holiday periods if this is required.
71. The vast majority of care leavers aged 16 to 18 are well supported to continue their education and training or enter the world of work. A recently developed post-16 PEP is having a positive impact on focusing attention on the next steps that young people need to take in their education. Good relationships with local colleges and training providers mean that their progress is being carefully monitored, and young people are attending training programmes that meet their needs.
72. Unfortunately, the more positive picture for the 16 to 18 cohort of care leavers being supported to continue their education and training is not replicated for the older cohort aged 19 to 21. Currently, a significant proportion of this group are not in education, employment or training (NEET). A number of these young people are not able to work, for example, because they have recently become parents or are suffering from anxiety and depression.
(Recommendation)
73. The council has been too slow in offering this older cohort of care leavers work experience or apprenticeships across the council. Staff have recognised that more needs to be done to reduce the number of care leavers who are NEET. A new service, 'The Workplace', has been established, which will be devoted to helping care leavers back into education, training or work. Briefing meetings are planned with the council across a wide range of departments to encourage teams to consider offering care leavers work experience, taster programmes and, where appropriate, apprenticeships. As this initiative is so new, it is too early to determine how successful these measures will be in reducing the number of care leavers who are NEET.
74. Young people have good access to free leisure services, and this offer now includes the opportunity to take a friend. Young people said that they really like the fact that they can attend the gym or take a friend swimming if they want to.
75. PAs celebrate young people's individual achievements in a variety of ways, for example taking them out for meals when they successfully complete their academic qualifications, birthday dinners and Christmas celebrations. Care leavers receive praise and encouragement for their other successes, for example gaining their driving licences, gaining employment, becoming parents or moving into their own homes. While these individual celebrations are appreciated by the young people, care leavers' successes are not part of a wider celebration event. Currently, care leavers are being consulted about how they would like to celebrate their achievements more widely.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Leaders and managers in South Tyneside are ambitious and tenacious in their pursuit to deliver outstanding services. Rapid improvements have been achieved, and ongoing work is well focused. Well-cultivated relationships with partners enable the local authority to be nimble in developing better services to help and protect children. Over the last 18 months, the DCS has taken a systematic approach to improvement, prioritising areas of greatest impact. He has progressed the redesign of the front door through ISIT, restructured and significantly improved the team for disabled children and embedded a culture of quality assurance and performance, while ensuring that the workforce is well supported to develop key skills to improve the quality of practice.</p> <p>Senior managers and leaders are determined in their approach to understand frontline practice, and there is effective performance management and quality assurance. All of the areas identified through this inspection are already well understood and included in improvement planning.</p> <p>Some areas of development are still not mature enough to measure impact. For example, work is ongoing to broaden the reach of MAGIC to capture the views of children, which is a strength individually. However, as a collective voice, this is not yet shaping and influencing service developments. Learning from advocacy and complaints is not yet collated and analysed to understand what children are saying about the quality of services they receive, or used to inform improvements.</p> <p>The chief executive, DCS and head of service set high standards, and ensure a clear line of accountability across the service, while fostering an environment that supports best practice through its significant commitment to ongoing professional development. This strong offer enables the local authority to recruit, as well as retain, staff effectively, despite regional pressures and influences. Staff feel valued and proud to work for the local authority.</p> <p>As the local authority has already identified, challenge and rigour of management oversight are not sufficiently focused on improving the quality of practice or on providing clear management direction to avoid any unnecessary delay. Although social workers receive regular supervision, this is not sufficiently reflective or of a consistently good quality.</p> <p>Corporate parents have not been sufficiently challenging of shortfalls in services, for example in relation to care leavers aged 19 to 21 who are NEET.</p>	

Inspection findings

76. The chief executive is a passionate advocate for children and young people, and this has secured good-quality services. Since the 2013 Ofsted inspection, children's social care budgets have been protected and additional monies made available to implement a new electronic recording system, redesign the front door through ISIT and further invest in edge of care services. There has been successful recruitment of senior managers who share a commitment to continual improvement. Following the JTAI in February 2016, the DCS has systematically improved a number of service areas, prioritising areas of greatest impact. The pace of change has been impressive. The front door through ISIT is restructured, and there are significant improvements to services for children who have disabilities. A culture of quality assurance and performance is well embedded. The workforce is stable and well supported. The right conditions have been created for social work to flourish now that statutory compliance requirements are met.
77. Senior leaders and managers have invested in building and retaining strong and trusting relationships with partners. Partners share the same vision and values and understand the strength of working together to shape and commit resources, and deliver improved services for children and young people. For example, there has been good investment by partners in relation to the implementation of ISIT and Encompass, a domestic abuse initiative in schools, and in tackling children at risk of exploitation. This demonstrates effective commitment from partners to secure timely and appropriate services for children.
78. Since the JTAI in February 2016, the local authority and partners have focused on improving the response to children at risk of exploitation and children who go missing from school, home and care, and they are successfully delivering highly effective services through Sanctuary South. Intelligence is collated and shared, informing targeted disruption activities, and there is appropriate focus on improving further services to children who go missing.
79. Neglect is a significant feature of children who need help and protection in South Tyneside. The local authority has invested in understanding its nature and prevalence, identifying geographical hot spots and uncovering a common factor of domestic abuse through its impressive neglect profile. Work with the community safety partnership ensures the availability of a broad range of domestic abuse services, and the neglect profile is used to identify gaps in provision. For example, external funding was secured to target families in which the toxic trio is prevalent and inhibiting parents' ability to engage in interventions. However, this is very new and the impact is yet to be measured.
80. Positive relationships with Cafcass and the courts and effective monitoring of the PLO mean that the progression of children's cases through the court system is improving. Assessments and care plans have improved in quality,

demonstrating good impact of targeted training. IROs provide effective challenge to the local authority, including appropriate escalation of concerns when necessary to the head of service and to Cafcass.

81. Clear lines of accountability and robust governance arrangements ensure effective communication and challenge at all levels across the service. Regular meetings between the chief executive and the independent chair of the South Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (STSCB) and fortnightly meetings between the lead member and DCS are ensuring accountability. The lead member has a clear overview and understanding of frontline practice from chairing the corporate parenting committee, and the Children and Families Board and through attending the Health and Wellbeing Board and STSCB. Her knowledge is enhanced through a genuine commitment to improving practice through regular visits to teams and operational meetings as additional assurance about the quality of services for children and young people.
82. The corporate parenting committee has been refreshed to provide improved strategic oversight of the newly developed strategy for children looked after and care leavers. There is clear member commitment articulated; however, this is not translated into strong challenge. For example, there has been insufficient challenge of service quality for care leavers. The council has been too slow to provide apprenticeships and to improve education, training and employment opportunities for 19 to 21-year-olds. Priorities set are not ambitious and they are not enabling members to hold the service to account. (Recommendation)
83. The chief executive and DCS have a clear line of sight to frontline practice, and this has been a key factor in securing service improvement. They have good levels of contact with partner agencies and social work teams and dedicated sessions with MAGIC. Regular children's services performance information is provided, independent from the DCS, directly through the performance team. This identifies areas for further investigation through deep-dive sessions, and he works collaboratively with staff to quickly mobilise resources to address issues.
84. Children contribute effectively to their assessments and plans. However, as a collective voice, they are not yet shaping and influencing services. The local authority has taken action to improve this, and a newly recruited participation and engagement manager has broadened the reach of MAGIC and introduced six-monthly sessions with MAGIC, the DCS and head of service to provide a platform for young people to hold senior managers to account. However, these developments are not yet mature enough to enable children and young people to inform, shape and improve the services they receive. Advocacy is not well used, and the council is not monitoring children's use of the complaints process effectively. Learning from these sources is not systematically analysed to inform, change and improve practice. This is a missed opportunity to understand what children are saying about the services they receive. (Recommendation)

85. The local authority meets the requirements of the sufficiency duty and supports local foster carers effectively to promote placement stability. Successful regional consortium arrangements allow the local authority to manage demand and match children effectively with carers who can best meet their needs. The profile of children looked after is well understood, and the local authority responds effectively to their changing needs. For example, the high prevalence of older children entering care has led to a review of the provision of edge of care and respite services for children aged 10 to 16 and additional investment in providing foster carers with enhanced payments for skills to meet the needs of children with more challenging behaviour.
86. Following considerable focus over the last 18 months, a coherent and intelligent performance management and quality assurance framework is now embedded and is successfully enabling managers to identify and be proactive about tackling areas of concern. Managers receive a range of useful performance information, and monthly performance clinics establish priority areas to inform thematic audits. Information is routinely scrutinised, well understood and used effectively to improve services. For example, visits to children in need within expected timescales increased from 45% in 2016 to 89% at the time of the inspection.
87. Audit activity is systematically used to improve practice. Audits are part of routine practice and completed by all levels of the service, including the DCS. Individual findings are discussed with social workers, promoting a shared understanding of good practice. This provides an impressive foundation for service improvement, drawing together regular performance information to inform audit activity, set improvement targets, align resources to meet these improvements and inform social worker training. Consequently, leaders and managers know themselves very well. Issues raised by the inspection team are well understood and included in their ongoing improvement plan.
88. Workforce development is a significant strength, and there is a very strong commitment to continuing professional development. South Tyneside appropriately prioritises recruitment and retention of high-quality professionals. The local authority's work with universities provides good opportunities for placements for students. This has been a key foundation for change and improvement in children's services. The local authority has invested in creating a culture in which social work can flourish. Practice weeks are having a positive influence on upskilling and refreshing skills across the workforce. Daily emails linking to research and practice, book clubs, use of webinars, lunchtime seminars, direct training, guest speakers, children- and young people-led workshops and specific team activity are making a positive difference and helping to embed a learning culture. The redesigned assessed support year in employment offer has increased reflection time and the alignment of employee performance management (annual appraisal) with the healthcare professional council standards, and dedicated management training is supplemented by coaching and mentoring.

89. While management oversight of cases is regular, management challenge is not consistently robust. Although social workers receive regular supervision, this is not of consistently good quality. Where this is weaker, recorded supervision provides an update on children's circumstances, as opposed to providing challenge and direction where there are delays in meeting children's needs and progressing plans. In these instances managers are overly focused on compliance rather than on addressing where the quality of practice could be improved. (Recommendation)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

South Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board meets its statutory requirements effectively. Strong governance, with priorities clearly aligned to key areas for safeguarding children, has ensured that the board is increasingly influential in improving the quality of services to children.

Partnerships are strong with wide representation, commitment and a healthy culture of challenge. The board has appropriate representation from key partner agencies, and the influence of the board chair ensures that partners are held to account for safeguarding children. The board is responsive, influential and ambitious, driving developments and improvements in key services, such as responses to child sexual exploitation, the 'Prevent' duty and services for children who have disabilities.

The multi-agency response to tackling MSET children has been very successful in developing a clear strategy, raising awareness and coordinating disruption and prevention activities.

The board is a learning organisation. Multi-agency challenge and commitment to safeguarding are seen through the comprehensive analysis of information from a range of sources, including audits, serious case reviews, child deaths and external inspections. However, despite some improvements, performance data is not always good enough to enable partners to robustly challenge the effectiveness of services. For example, data on return home interviews is currently reported as those offered, not those undertaken, and data in respect of early help services is underdeveloped.

The board's response to ensuring the quality of services for children living out of area has not been prioritised. This is a significant deficit given that these children are particularly vulnerable and often have complex needs.

The comprehensive training offer from the board is well aligned to the strategic priorities of partnerships to improve working practice in safeguarding children and improving outcomes.

STSCB is engaging well with children and young people to raise issues of safeguarding. The locally based drama production 'Is This Your Story?' about child sexual exploitation, social media and consent has been well received and has resulted in some children asking for support.

Recommendations

90. Ensure that the quality of services for children living out of area is reported and considered by partners.
91. Improve the quality of performance data to inform partners and enhance challenge.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

92. Strong, clearly defined governance arrangements, combined with highly effective and committed partnerships, ensure that the board meets its statutory responsibilities well. The board has appropriate representation from key partner agencies and there are effective links to the local Children and Families Board and Health and Wellbeing Board. The board chair was instrumental in the development of the Children’s Multi-Agency Leadership Group and has been proactive in extending the influence of the board, undertaking annual meetings with the chief executives of partner agencies and headteachers. The influence of the board has also been strengthened through close collaboration between STSCB and the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB).
93. The 2016–2017 STSCB annual report provides a comprehensive analysis of the performance, effectiveness, impact and influence of the board. This is enhanced by the board’s self-assessment, which is regularly updated to provide a contemporary overview of the work of the board. The current self-assessment provides an accurate evaluation overall, providing examples of good practice and identifying where further improvements are required to safeguarding children in South Tyneside.
94. The STSCB strategic plan 2014–2018 is ambitious and appropriately reflects the key priorities for the partnerships in safeguarding children. Priorities are reviewed at least annually through consultation with children, analysis of performance data, outcomes of audits, learning reviews and changing priorities. This ensures a consistent focus on important issues for children. The detailed STSCB business plan provides a valuable framework to monitor progress in relation to the priorities. The board manager maintains and monitors the action log issues raised in meetings.
95. Comprehensive up-to-date policies and procedures that meet current statutory requirements are commissioned through a sub-regional consortium of local authorities. These are available online and are updated to reflect any national developments and legislative changes. The board also reviews the policies and procedures on a rolling basis to ensure that they are current and relevant to South Tyneside.

96. Board members have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to safeguarding children in South Tyneside. They are knowledgeable about the key priorities and challenges for the board. Members of the board acknowledge that during the last two years the board, under the current chair, has had an improved focus on safeguarding children. This is due to the strength of partnership relationships, which support effective challenge and improvement; for example, in the rigour of the multi-agency response to the areas for improvement identified in April 2016 following the JTAI of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect. Rigorous monitoring of the improvement plan, as well as development of strategies and delivery of training, have led to improvements in services and outcomes for children, in particular improvements to service delivery within the children and disabilities service and the work of the neglect working group to develop the multi-agency neglect strategy proposal.
97. In addition to the improvements following the JTAI, the board has also been highly influential in the development of the ISIT and promoting the increased police representation within ISIT. In response to domestic abuse, the board has also driven the coordinated multi-agency assessment against domestic abuse and the provision of independent domestic violence advisers in hospital settings.
98. The highly efficient strategic responses to MSET children have been strengthened through the alignment of the strategic group with SAB to provide an additional focus on vulnerable adults. The MSET operational subgroup of the STSCB reports to the strategic group to ensure that important intelligence is shared. The MSET group has been very successful in developing a clear strategy, raising awareness and coordinating disruption and prevention activities. The MSET group also developed and delivered training to multi-agency practitioners. The training has been invaluable in raising awareness of child sexual exploitation. For example, the training of local taxi drivers resulted in a 52% increase in their reporting concerns about children who may have been at risk of child sexual exploitation. This enabled prompt action to be taken by the police to safeguard children. The board has also developed constructive links to promote positive engagement with the local faith and community groups. This includes raising awareness of child sexual exploitation to the local mosques and churches.
99. Board members are influential in driving improvement in their own organisations and in maintaining a focus on key safeguarding issues. The board has recently streamlined the multi-agency threshold guidance to improve partner responses to safeguard children. Members are confident that the thresholds are well understood across their agencies through the use of audits, sampling and monitoring of performance data to provide assurance.
100. The board is highly responsive to current issues. When a virtual reality game for children resulted in children putting themselves at risk on the local cliffs in search of some of the virtual characters, the swift multi-agency response

initiated by the board manager resulted in the game's designers removing the characters from cliff edge locations.

101. The effectiveness of the board, and the strength and commitment of partnership working are demonstrated through the robust challenge and focus on children seen in the comprehensive audit programme. The audit programme is developed by the learning and improvement sub-group, which is responsive to the key safeguarding issues for the local authority and its partners. Partners contribute consistently to the audit programme, which includes multi-agency, single-agency and section 11 audits. This provides a rich source of information, which, combined with information from other sources including serious case reviews, child deaths, children's views and external inspections, provides a comprehensive overview of the state of safeguarding practice within South Tyneside. This enables the board to focus its priorities and training agenda.
102. The comprehensive training offer from the board is developed through consultation and analysis. Training is evaluated to ensure that it is raising awareness and improving practice. The training offer is well aligned to the strategic priorities of partnerships to improve working practice in safeguarding children and improving outcomes. A strength of the workforce development group has been its merger with the training group from the SAB. This supports coordinated working on the 'think family' approach, especially in response to children in families in which alcohol, substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental ill health are prevalent.
103. The voice of children in the work of the board is increasingly influential, ensuring that important issues for children are highlighted and understood. A local drama production 'Is this your story?' based on the South Tyneside child MSET profile, has been performed in a number of schools. This has been very worthwhile and has resulted in some children seeking support and advice. The junior LSCB has been proactively involved in anti-bullying campaigns, raising awareness in schools and presenting awards. The STSCB and the community safety partnership have worked collaboratively and innovatively with a local school, South Tyneside Ability Football Club and media students from the University of Sunderland to develop an online training programme promoting online safety for vulnerable young people and young adults at risk.
104. There have been improvements in the quality and analysis of performance data provided to the board since the JTAI in 2016. The board knows that there are still areas for development in the quality of information and analysis to enhance members' understanding and help them to challenge more robustly. For example, data on return home interviews is currently reported as those offered, not those undertaken. Consequently, the board was not aware of the true picture in respect of the number of interviews undertaken. In addition, the performance data for early help services is underdeveloped and does not provide the board with the detailed information it needs to

understand and challenge the effectiveness of multi-agency working.
(Recommendation)

105. Despite the commitment seen to safeguarding children, the board has not prioritised or considered the challenges for children looked after living out of area, and there is no evidence of partnership challenge on the quality of services and support that these very vulnerable children receive. This is a significant oversight. (Recommendation)
106. When there are children's cases that meet the criteria for a serious case review or in instances in which learning can be taken forward from significant incidents, the board responds appropriately. The processes for serious case reviews ensure that practitioners are fully involved in the process to take forward learning and improve practice. In addition, the learning is used to inform strategies and guidance, for example in ensuring that inter-familial child sexual abuse is included in training on neglect.
107. The STSCB has developed detailed policies and procedures in respect of female genital mutilation and has delivered training to raise awareness across the partnerships, particularly for police and schools. The policy and procedures appropriately link to policies relating to domestic violence and forced marriage.
108. A proactive approach to the 'Prevent' duty in collaboration with the community safety partnership has resulted in valuable work with frontline professionals and schools in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. The Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent training has been delivered to 2,400 professionals. In addition, wider links have been established to raise awareness in local faith groups, the voluntary sector and colleges. In partnership with the STSCB and local authority, a 'Prevent' duty information leaflet for parents and carers has been distributed to schools. Awareness training on trafficking and modern-day slavery has also been delivered to partners, importantly to the local business community.
109. The child death review sub-group, reporting to the regional South of Tyne child death overview panel, which comprises three local authority areas, ensures that procedures are implemented appropriately following the death of any child in South Tyneside. The panel has identified some important areas of learning, most notably the identification of modifiable factors when reviewing local deaths and wider learning from serious incidents. The group has successfully promoted smoking cessation in pregnancy, resulting in the reduction in women smoking in pregnancy from 25% to 21% over the last 12 months. The group was instrumental in the local implementation of the 'Give me Room to Breathe Campaign' in respect of safe sleeping.

Information about this inspection

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

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference 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 from Ofsted and two Ofsted inspectors.

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