

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

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

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection date: 25 September to 19 October 2017

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Children's services in the Blackburn with Darwen Council area are good	
1. Children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Good

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

Inspectors found that services for children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen are good. The director of children's services (DCS) and her senior management team have an accurate view of the strengths and the areas needing further development in the service. The wider council is supportive of the department, with corporate priorities that focus on improving outcomes for children and safeguarding vulnerable people. Since the last inspection, there have been some good improvements, including enhanced support to the mainstream service through teams of family support workers and advanced practitioners, as well as the implementation of a locally designed framework for assessing risk. Early intervention is a priority, with well-coordinated support delivered through eight designated children's centres, and well-coordinated support for disabled children and young people. Staff use all of these initiatives to enable children to remain living at home when it is safe to do so. Some areas of help and protection are not as strong as those for children looked after but, across all areas of the service, including some services providing help and protection, inspectors saw some very good services delivering improved outcomes for children.

During 2016–17, there were significant capacity issues in children's services. These were the result of a reduction in the council budget at the same time as substantial increases in the demand for children's services, at a period when the DCS was spending some of her time supporting another local authority. During this time, the DCS and her team continued to support and further improve services, but the performance of assessment teams dipped and, for some children who were less at risk, there were delays in the support that they were given. In May 2017, following representations from the DCS and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and findings from a peer review, the council reinstated the £2.5 million that had been removed from the children's services budget in 2016–17. As a result, there has been further improvement to help and protection services, although they are not yet consistently good.

Children at immediate risk receive a timely and effective service to protect them from harm. Early help support is good and partner commitment continues to improve. The response to referrals by the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and out-of-hours support is good. Children who are being helped by social workers are seen regularly and their views recorded. Services for children at risk of child sexual exploitation and those missing from home are good. The work done to address concerns about radicalisation and tackle female genital mutilation are strengths in the area. The work of the designated officer, who coordinates the response when there are concerns about professionals potentially abusing children, is also good.

Across the service, most assessments of children's needs are timely, but the quality is variable and because they are not always updated they sometimes do not inform key decision-making. The response to children suffering chronic neglect, including delays in pre-proceedings, for example, is not always made quickly enough to improve their outcomes. Children in need and child protection planning is effective

for many children, with partners working together to deliver a good range of support services to meet children's needs. Plans could be further improved if the action points were clearer and more detailed, for example what needs to change and by when. There is good support for disabled children, but preparations for their transition to adult services need to start earlier.

Children are very positive about being looked after by Blackburn with Darwen Council and speak highly of the support and care that they receive. Children looked after benefit from social workers who know them well and see them alone, and who build positive and trusting relationships. In the main, court work is of a high standard. Matching is a strength and children benefit from stable placements. Very few children are placed at a distance from their local communities, and those who are continue to receive good support. The level of participation of children looked after is high and they have a wide range of opportunities to influence both local and regional practice. Children looked after, for example, are able to influence how their reviews are run, and their views clearly inform plans. In a small number of cases, the challenge from independent reviewing officers (IROs) is insufficient, for instance when there is a lack of progress with fostered children, who wait too long for formal confirmation that they are in their permanent placements. Apart from those children who have a plan for adoption, not all children have benefited from the availability of life-story work. Effective health services and specialist support promote good outcomes. The education achievement of children looked after is good for children in primary schools. Children looked after do not achieve well when they take GCSEs. The quality of personal education plans is not consistently good and the use of pupil premium funding could be further improved. There is strong corporate parenting and support to children looked after from across the council. 'Children's and young people's voice', a group for children looked after, is well embedded and contributes to the improvement of services.

The adoption service is good. Inspectors saw evidence of tenacious practice with children who are harder to place, as well as a clear senior management direction, in which doing the right thing for children is the priority. The feedback from adopters was overwhelmingly positive about the support that they receive, as well as the delivery of quality services from application through to ongoing adoption placement. Adopters acknowledge their post-adoption support as a high-quality service.

Good practice is evident in the leaving care team, and workers are in contact with all care leavers. Services for young people are flexible and responsive, delivered by a well-established and experienced team of personal advisers. Care leavers have good access to a range of health services. They use their voice well to shape and inform the delivery of services provided to them. Care leavers benefit from a good range of suitable accommodation in which they report that they feel safe. Most care leavers progress on to a range of positive education, employment and training (EET) outcomes, although the numbers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are increasing. The service does not yet have a consistent approach to offering work placements and work experience for young people who are not yet ready for an apprenticeship.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates four children's homes. Three were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspections.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements/ arrangements for the protection of children was in January 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for looked after children was in January 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since October 2012.
- The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board has been in post since April 2013.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 38,383 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Blackburn with Darwen. This is 26% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 27% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 15% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 16% (the national average is 14%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for over 50% of all children living in the area, compared with 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.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 43% (the national average is 21%)
 - in secondary schools is 33% (the national average is 16%).

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

- A substantial number of local children are of Eastern European heritage, with the largest proportion being drawn from the Polish community.

Child protection in this area

- At 27 September 2017, 1,621 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a decrease from 1,781 as at 31 March 2017.
- At 27 September 2017, 306 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a decrease from 315 at 31 March 2017.
- At 27 September 2017, one child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a decrease from two at 31 March 2017.
- Since the last inspection, 11 serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and four serious case reviews have been completed or were ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 27 September 2017, 376 children are being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 98 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 370 (96 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2017.

Of this number:

- 143 (or 38%) live outside the local authority area
- 25 live in residential children's homes, of whom 72% live out of the authority area
- two live in residential special schools,³ and both live out of the authority area
- 237 live with foster families, of whom 38% live out of the authority area
- 68 live with parents, all of whom live in the borough
- four children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

In the last 12 months:

- there have been 27 adoptions
- 30 children became the subject of special guardianship orders
- 139 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 1% subsequently returned to be looked after
- two children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living.

No young person ceased to be looked after and lives in a house in multiple occupation.

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or fewer per year.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that all assessments are timely and updated to reflect changes in the children's lives, and to take account of their history and identity needs.
2. Ensure that children's plans contain clear actions, timescales and outcomes, and that actions are progressed effectively to avoid drift and delay for the child.
3. Ensure that the transition arrangements for disabled children are focused on the needs of the individual child and that clear plans are in place well before their 18th birthday.
4. Improve the quality and timeliness of pre-proceedings work, particularly in relation to chronic neglect, and ensure that monitoring systems are in place to prevent delay.
5. Ensure that life-story work and later-life letters are available for children looked after to assist each child's understanding of their history and plan for their future.
6. Ensure that personal education plans for children looked after involve children and young people and are specific about targets and achievements, and that the impact of pupil premium funds is monitored and used to best effect.
7. Improve work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers.
8. Ensure that supervision for all staff is both regular and reflective, and promotes high-quality social work practice.
9. Ensure that the performance monitoring framework analyses and reports on children's individual experiences, as well as the compliance of the activity undertaken by social workers.

Summary for children and young people

- At the time of the inspection, most services for children in Blackburn with Darwen are good.
- Elected councillors and senior managers know how good the services are. They listen to the views of children and young people, and this helps them to make decisions about the children's services that the council provides.
- Social workers are very committed to helping children and protecting them from harm, and they know them well. However, some children experience many changes in the social worker who supports them. When this happens, it is hard for children and young people to come to know and build strong relationships with them. All of the social workers who met inspectors reported how much they enjoyed working for Blackburn with Darwen Council. More money will be spent on children's services and, because of this, more social workers are about to start working for the council. Social workers make regular visits to see children and their families to work together to see how their lives could be improved. Social workers and other agencies such as schools, police and health work together well to make sure that children are safer.
- Children and young people who are not able to live with their own families are assisted to live with suitably matched foster families or good-quality children's homes, or are supported to move back home with their families if this is right for them. Children looked after receive good support for their emotional and physical health. They receive help to remain in contact with their parents and friends, and have access to leisure services. The 'Children's and young people's voice' group provides good help to children looked after, and councillors and senior managers make sure that things happen to further improve children's lives.
- When children have a plan for adoption, this happens quickly and there is an increasing choice of adopters for children in need of adoption. Social workers make sure that children and their adoptive parents receive plenty of help and support.
- Care leavers receive a good service. They have a great deal of help and are supported by their personal advisers. As a result, they all stay in regular contact, and this helps young people successfully to prepare for independence. Almost all care leavers stay in suitable accommodation or remain living with their foster carers until they are ready to leave. A high number of care leavers go to college or university. However, increasing numbers are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Requires improvement to be good

Summary

Since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012, identified areas for improvement have been addressed. The quality of strategy discussions, section 47 inquiries and the management of allegations against adults who work with children have improved and are now good. Blackburn with Darwen’s ‘risk sensible’ model was developed and rolled out to all staff, resulting in a well-used framework to assess need, evaluate progress and deliver individual targeted services.

Despite this, overall, this area is not as strong as it was in 2012. This is because there was an increase in the need for help and protection support for children during 2016-17 which resulted in a large increase in social work assessments, more children in need and more children subject to protection plans. The capacity of workers and managers was stretched, creating a delay for some children entering the Public Law Outline (PLO). On this inspection, inspectors saw good work across the service, but there is too much variability in the assessment and safeguarding teams.

A wide range of early help services, coordinated through the eight designated local authority children’s centres, ensure that most children and families who need early help are able to access support when they need it. The quality of response at the ‘front door’ via the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is strong. The response from social workers when children need protection from immediate risk is timely. Strategy discussions are effective and ensure well-planned investigations that protect children.

Children have their needs assessed in a timely way. The quality is not consistent, and assessments are not always updated to inform key decision-making, but immediate risk is identified well. Plans are effective for most children, with partners working together to deliver a good range of services to meet the needs of children. Plans are not always sufficiently specific and focused on outcomes, especially those plans for children living in situations of chronic neglect.

Support for children at risk of domestic abuse is robust, and a new multi-agency partnership hub is further improving services. The response to radicalisation is comprehensive and well coordinated. Effective assessments ensure that children at risk of sexual exploitation receive a high-quality, multi-agency response. Support services are flexible and reduce the risk to children. When children go missing, return home interviews gather high-quality information to inform their care plans. Intelligence is also recorded and shared, which adds to the wider picture about risks for children in the area.

Inspection findings

10. The demand for help and protection services in Blackburn with Darwen has increased substantially over the past two years. The number of referrals and subsequent assessments and the number of children subject to child protection plans have risen significantly, and the rate per 10,000 is now broadly similar to that of comparator authorities. In the main, this is a result of improvements in the recognition of issues through the expansion of early help services, the re-focused multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the borough-wide common approach to risk assessment.
11. Staffing vacancies due to budget reductions and the increase in demand have affected the performance in children's social care. Caseloads rose significantly, particularly in the assessment and safeguarding teams, and this affected the ability of social workers to carry out non-urgent work in a timely manner. The timeliness of undertaking assessments and holding of reviews also dipped. Despite this, inspectors saw much good work, yet there was too much variability. Urgent action continued to be taken when children were identified as at risk.
12. Most recently and since May 2017, inspectors saw that senior management oversight and actions have resulted in improvements in help and protection services. This includes reductions in caseloads and better supervision, leading to improvements in the timeliness and thoroughness of social work actions.
13. Children who need help and protection receive an effective and timely response from the MASH. Multi-agency professionals work well with local authority staff to screen contacts and gather information. Social work managers use the local authority 'risk sensible' approach to evaluate risk. This ensures a common approach to decision-making that is shared with partner agencies. Where children are identified as in need of early help, staff in the MASH identify agencies that can offer support or act as lead professionals, and those cases are appropriately signposted to an alternative service.
14. There is a good range of early help services delivered through the local authority's eight designated children's centres that respond to the needs of children at an early stage. The numbers of common assessment frameworks (CAFs) have steadily increased and approximately 450 are currently open, with professionals from a range of agencies, in particular from primary schools, taking the role of lead professional. There is a family support team of 15.5 workers. These workers will each become a lead professional for complex early help cases and also undertake direct work with children on the child in need and child protection plans.
15. Children who are identified by the MASH as at risk of immediate harm are progressed quickly for immediate action. Three assessment and safeguarding teams work in rotation and ensure that work is allocated immediately. The vast majority of strategy discussions take place on the same day, using conference

call facilities to ensure that all relevant agencies take part. This leads to good information sharing, risk analysis and effective planning. Investigations are undertaken and partners come to clear decisions. Children are safer because of the actions taken. Robust out-of-office arrangements are provided by the Blackburn with Darwen emergency duty team, which responds to children's issues, adults' issues and mental health issues that arise out of office hours.

16. The timeliness of assessments completed within a timescale beneficial to the child has improved during 2017, and is now good. The quality of assessments also improved during the year. Many assessments are of good quality, although some do not fully take account of children's history or the impact of previous life experiences. The consideration of children's identity needs sometimes focuses solely on their ethnicity and language. Some assessments are not always updated in response to a change or lack of progress, or before making a key decision such as ending a child protection plan. (Recommendation)
17. Child protection plans identify well the issues and the improvements needed. Clear and immediate risk is responded to well. Plans are effective in reducing the risk of harm. The local authority identified and told inspectors that its work in relation to chronic neglect needed improvement, and it has been working with partner agencies to develop a tool to roll out across Blackburn with Darwen. The identification of this issue means that the impact of neglect on some children is not understood by the local authority and that it is not clear when circumstances for children do not improve. When there is a lack of progress and agreement that the threshold for care proceedings has been met, it does not always result in timely applications for care proceedings being issued, for some children. The lack of a management system to monitor the progress of pre-proceedings work leads to drift and delay for some children. (Recommendation)
18. The timeliness of initial conferences is now good. Due to administrative support issues, almost 25% of review conferences are held a few days outside of the national timescales. Children benefit from regular core groups that coordinate a good range of support services to help them. Most core groups are timely, with attendance from a good range of professionals. Parents are consulted and encouraged to participate. Children are formally consulted prior to their reviews, and their wishes and feelings inform decision-making.
19. The vast majority of children are seen regularly and, where appropriate, are seen alone. Social workers know the children well, and gather and record their wishes and feelings as part of their visits and assessments. Some children have had too many changes of social workers. For a small number of children, this means that they are not being seen as often as they should be or that they are seen by other social workers in the team. Family support workers also provide assistance and direct work to families, and regular visits by them and partner agencies contribute to children's safety and well-being.

20. Children with social workers in the disability team have well-coordinated packages of support that meet their needs. These packages include short breaks, direct payments and extra support with health and communication. Children are referred to the safeguarding teams for further assessment when risk is identified. The local authority has a policy of not making a referral to adult services for any child until they are 17. This means that disabled children are often approaching their 18th birthday without a clear plan. This causes uncertainty for children and their families, and does not ensure that there is enough time to finalise packages of support for those with the most complex needs. (Recommendation)
21. Assessments and support for children at risk of domestic abuse are good. A well-organised multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) ensures information sharing and oversight of planning to reduce risk. The focus of action is to reduce risk to victims, including children. Where children are open to social care, information from MARAC is recorded on files and informs care planning. All children and families are offered specialist support and intervention from a wide range of commissioned services. These include services to support victims, perpetrators and children. Initial risks associated with domestic abuse are well identified and responded to. A new multi-agency hub has started to work with children living with domestic abuse where there is also parental mental ill health or substance misuse. Inspectors saw good care planning and support for children by this team.
22. The response to allegations made against adults who work with children is strong. The local authority designated officer gives appropriate advice and guidance. Immediate and future risk to children is reduced because of effective planning. Training and awareness raising in faith communities has resulted in a continued increase in notifications.
23. Strong partnerships provide good coordination of the response to child sexual exploitation in Blackburn with Darwen. The early identification of children at risk of exploitation leads to assessment and intervention via the multi-agency team, and this reduces risk. When children are being exploited, there is evidence of persistent attempts to engage them in direct work and to gather information and intelligence.
24. The links between exploitation and incidents of going missing from home are well understood and coordinated. When children are missing from home, notifications are timely. Return home interviews take place quickly. Records of these interviews are of good quality, with detailed information about what children are doing, thinking and feeling when they go missing. Records show good intelligence gathering about locations, peer groups and adults who may pose a risk to children. This intelligence is shared with police, who follow up to support action and reduce risk. The local authority and wider partnership have good oversight of the children who go missing and good understanding of the cohort that is also at risk of sexual exploitation. Intelligence is used to inform the action taken across the borough about hotspots and specific adults.

25. The approach to children missing education is good. The local authority has recently revised its protocol and reporting arrangements with partner schools. Daily monitoring of the register of children missing education takes place, with an evaluation of referrals and assessment of risk ensuring an appropriate response. There are effective links between professionals, with good systems established for monitoring children missing from home and those at risk of sexual exploitation. The local authority is persistent in ascertaining the reasons for elective home education. Staff scrutinise the plans of parents to ensure that arrangements are suitable, and check to establish whether the child or their family have known vulnerabilities.
26. The response by partner agencies to children at risk of radicalisation is good. Comprehensive information gathering supports effective decisions to refer to the 'Channel' panel. When a referral to the panel is progressed, detailed action plans are put in place to manage and reduce risk. Children are safer as the result of the action taken.
27. Awareness raising and training by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in Blackburn with Darwen has led to effective practice in response to female genital mutilation and radicalisation. Health professionals identify children at risk of female genital mutilation and refer them for social work assessment. In cases seen by inspectors, detailed assessments evidence the use of research, the voice of the child and analysis of the risk to inform action, including taking legal action when appropriate.
28. There are low numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements. Children living in private fostering situations are visited and their needs assessed. There is more to do to raise awareness about private fostering across the borough.
29. All 16- and 17-year-olds who are homeless are provided with suitable accommodation and a good range of additional support. The local authority has access to an impressive range and amount of accommodation provision for young people. Accommodation includes emergency beds for up to nine nights' stay, supported accommodation in flats, foyer arrangements, and flats for young people with complex needs and for young parents and young families. No young people have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for the last two years.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Services for children looked after in Blackburn with Darwen are good. Staff, managers and corporate parents are ambitious and aspirational for children and care leavers, and social workers are committed to the children with whom they work. Children speak highly of the support and care that they receive.</p> <p>Risks for children looked after are recognised, and swift action is taken to reduce them. This includes the risk of child sexual exploitation and going missing from care. Children are involved in their safety planning and, when risks increase, managers take effective protective measures to safeguard children. The quality of court work is highly regarded.</p> <p>Placement matching is a strength, and children live in good, stable placements that meet their needs well and are able to maintain their local support networks. For a small number of children, there have been delays in formally confirming that their long-term foster carers will be their permanent carers. Not all children have benefited from life-story work when they become looked after. The participation of children looked after is a strength of Blackburn with Darwen. They influence how their reviews are run and their views clearly inform plans. Independent reviewing officers support children well, but written plans following reviews are not always specific and the challenge is not recorded on every occasion.</p> <p>Children looked after, including those placed at a distance from Blackburn with Darwen, have their health needs comprehensively met, with timely follow up by local services. Education support is good. Children who are at the early years foundation stage or key stages 1 or 2 achieve well, but performance at key stage 4 could be further improved. The quality of personal education plans is not consistently good enough and the use of the pupil premium could be monitored better.</p> <p>Adoption services are good, and children with a plan for adoption are promptly identified, matched and placed with their adoptive families. Permanence through adoption is achieved quickly for children from a diverse range of backgrounds and for those who have complex needs. Adopters are positive about the level of support that they receive, including post-adoption support.</p> <p>Care leavers benefit from strong and effective support at key points of transition and times of need. They live in safe and suitable accommodation that meets their needs and they use their voices well to inform the services provided to them. Care leavers who met with inspectors were positive about the help received, but stated that the range of apprenticeships and work experiences offered by the council could be more comprehensive.</p>	

Inspection findings

30. Decisions about children becoming looked after are appropriate, timely and clearly recorded. Legal planning meetings are effective, ensuring clarity on the threshold for care, the options available and the rationale for decisions made. Effective use of family group conferences ensures that early assessment of extended family members takes place, minimising delay in decision-making for most children.
31. The Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the judiciary that spoke to inspectors are complimentary about the quality of evidence and information sharing by social workers, particularly in relation to pre-birth work and where parents have previously had children removed. Inspectors sampled cases and found a lack of a formal review by managers, which would have assisted identifying where there had been a lack of sufficient progress. Care proceedings are usually progressed within the national target of 26 weeks due to good, well-prepared evidence. (Recommendation)
32. Plans for children returning home are child centred, and parents engage in meaningful work that is well coordinated by social workers. The cultural dynamics within the family, and how these affect risk management, are identified and well understood. Comprehensive and intensive support means that a return home is well supported.
33. The majority of assessments of children looked after are of good quality, explicit about risks and needs, and include the views of parents and children. For a small number, there is too much focus on presenting issues rather than on using history to aid understanding and work with the child. Assessments of brothers and sisters are informed by a thorough exploration of each child's individual needs, their relationship and their impact on each other.
34. Placement matching is a strength, and it fully involves children and parents. Placement plans detail children's routines and needs, and are specific about the expectations of the local authority and what carers can expect, including delegated authority arrangements. Identity and cultural needs are explicit, and plans reflect how carers will meet these needs. Although not impacting on their well-being, for some children there have been delays in formally confirming permanence in their long-term foster placements. In all of the cases seen by inspectors, children make good progress as a direct result of the foster care support that they receive. (Recommendation)
35. All children looked after are written to every four months to remind them of the complaints service and for any compliments. Children said that they understand how to make a complaint and receive support to do so. Children and young people also confirmed to inspectors that they knew about the advocacy service, which is provided by a voluntary organisation, and that they are able to seek support from this when they need it.

36. Social workers see children regularly and alone. Direct work with children informs assessments and planning, but life-story work and later-life letters are not always used to good effect to assist a child's understanding of their situation and plan. A range of communication skills used with disabled children give good insight and understanding of their lives, and their wishes and feelings. (Recommendation)
37. The independent reviewing officers (IROs) are a dedicated team with manageable caseloads, and they clearly know the children whom they support. They engage quickly with children and young people, following allocation, and see children or have contact with them between reviews. Although IROs are strong on involving children and their families in planning, subsequent written plans are not always specific. Inspectors also saw in a small number of cases that the formal challenge by IROs over a lack of progress was not always sufficiently robust.
38. Children looked after receive a comprehensive health service, including child and adolescent mental health services. Children looked after, including those placed at a distance from Blackburn with Darwen, have their health needs comprehensively met, with timely follow up by local services. Young people receive services promptly when substance misuse is identified. Emotional health provision for children is highly effective. The Revive team offers a timely, flexible service for children with an emotional health need, and this is complemented by the East Lancashire Child and adolescent service (ELCAS). Strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) are used well to identify need. If interventions are not in place or progress is slow, then the monthly SDQ panel, with members of Revive and ELCAS, reviews the support plan to ensure that children benefit from timely intervention. Good links with adult services identify ongoing need early and ensure smooth transitions for those young people in need of adult mental health services.
39. High-quality social work and multi-agency support result in positive outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Carefully matched placements ensure that their identity and cultural needs are met. Inspectors saw effective and successful challenge to maintain the stability of an independent fostering placement for two children. This is a good example of children's needs being prioritised and a leadership team that listens and responds to the views of staff for the benefit of children.
40. Children missing from care benefit from good, multi-agency risk management. Return interviews are always offered and workers make resolute efforts to engage young people. The return home interviews completed are clear on assessing risk. They make links with other risk areas, such as child sexual exploitation and substance misuse, and share the analysis with the professional network. The response to the risk of child sexual exploitation is good. Risk assessments are updated in response to changes in circumstances, and quick, multi-agency action is taken to address any concerns identified. Effective direct work engages young people in their safety planning.

41. Strong partnership work between the virtual school and secondary school headteachers has resulted in the development of the excellent 'peace charter' for children looked after, which emphasises the principles of equality, fairness, anti-bullying and respect. The charter skilfully develops children's understanding of differences in religion, culture and sexual orientation, as well as the importance of justice, democracy and human rights.
42. The response to children missing education is robust. Schools and strategic leads review progress and performance effectively in relation to all reported cases of children missing education. There have been no permanent exclusions of children looked after for the last three years, although the number of children subject to a fixed-term exclusion has increased over time. Close coordination between the virtual school and school partners ensures that children who experience difficulties in learning benefit from timely access to appropriate alternative education provision. Plans are in place for all children to return to full-time education with clear targets set.
43. The attainment and progress of children looked after is improving, and most children in the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 achieve good levels of attainment. However, at key stage 4, while the very large majority of children achieved at least one recognised qualification, few young people successfully gained five GCSEs at A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The quality of personal education plans is not yet consistently good. Target setting is not always clear enough, and this affects the ability to understand children's progress over time. Under-reporting of the use and impact of the pupil premium funding means that the local authority does not fully understand the resultant benefit for children. (Recommendation)
44. Foster carers are from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting the composition of the local community. Despite the significant recruitment activity undertaken by the local authority, the recruitment of foster carers remains a challenge. Foster carers are unanimous in their praise of the help, support, encouragement and feedback that they receive from their supervising social workers. They are clear about the decisions that they can make on behalf of the children and young people in their care, and are highly committed to Blackburn with Darwen children.
45. Fostering assessments are timely and of good quality. They are clear on foster carers' skills and are used well in placement matching. Foster carers' needs are regularly reviewed and the voice of children in their care informs their ongoing support and assessment. Foster carers receive high levels of support, including out-of-hours support and training, resulting in high-quality care for children in Blackburn with Darwen. The fostering panel benefits from an experienced chair and committed membership, with robust challenge and scrutiny of information evident.
46. The participation of children looked after is high and they are well represented by the 'Children's and young people's voice' group. Twenty-four Blackburn with

Darwen services have also been awarded the Investors in Children award for championing the rights of children and young people. The authority is good at raising the aspirations and confidence of its children through initiatives such as junior university, the creative arts project and accredited interview skills training, which has been used in the recruitment of social workers.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good

47. Adoption is considered for all children who need alternative permanent families. There are effective systems and processes in place to identify children for adoption at an early stage. The adoption service has effective oversight of all children who may benefit from permanence through adoption. Adoption team managers attend the legal gateway and case-tracking meetings for children under nine years old, facilitating the prompt, swift identification of potential adoption plans.
48. Children receive an effective service from a well-established and experienced team of adoption social workers, led by committed and knowledgeable managers. Adoption team managers understand service strengths and areas for development. Social workers know their children very well and track them through weekly care planning meetings, avoiding unnecessary delays. Team managers and social workers continuously review decisions to achieve permanence through the Public Law Outline (PLO) process and care proceedings. The adoption team is fully informed of children for whom adoption is the plan, and their plans progress quickly.
49. Children in Blackburn with Darwen successfully achieve permanence through adoption. Since September 2016, 27 children have been adopted. The adoption service has an ethos of never giving up on children, is supported by the evidence of its matching harder to place children. Family finding is thorough and has been highly successful in placing brothers and sisters together, including a brother and sister group of four children. Adoption has also been achieved for children with complex health needs.
50. Fostering to adopt, alongside effective parallel planning, demonstrates a further area of strong practice. The local authority consistently seeks to promote 'foster to adopt' placements and has been successful in placing four children through this practice. Potential adopters are visited quickly and attend preparation groups. Feedback from adopters is overwhelmingly positive about the service. Adopters describe good-quality support from the point of application through to adoption placement support.
51. Although adoption performance on the national scorecard is below the national target, more recently performance has improved. Year-on-year performance for children entering care and being placed with an adoptive family shows significant improvements in timescales. Every child is tracked to ensure that

delays are minimised and that children do not wait longer than is necessary to be adopted. Timescales in the last 12 months for placing children in adoptive placements have improved considerably, from 558 days to 401 days. The local authority is committed to pursuing adoption plans, with parallel planning routinely taking place to minimise delay.

52. Timescales for adopters' assessments and approvals is good. Within the last 12 months, 38 adopters have been approved in an average assessment time of three months, which is significantly inside the national timescale. This ensures that a wide range of adopters are available to meet the needs of children. Detailed reports demonstrate good analysis and enable the adoption panel and the agency decision maker to make informed recommendations and decisions. Adopters are approved from a wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the diverse communities of Blackburn with Darwen.
53. Children's permanence reports are of good quality. The reports paint a picture of children's lives and give a clear understanding of the impact upon them of their lived experiences. They are detailed in relation to age, identity and health. The reports identify children's specific needs, helping social workers and adopters to consider potential matches. Matching reports are also of good quality, enabling social workers to match the right children to the right adopters. The service uses a variety of methods to advertise and match children, including activity days and 'bump into' meetings.
54. Adoption social workers undertake good-quality direct work that prepares children well for adoption. The assessment and matching of adopters are good. There have been two adoption disruptions in the last two-and-a-half years.
55. The use of different tools helps children to make sense of what is happening to them. Children benefit from life-story books that sensitively describe their histories. Social workers are also skilled in writing later-life letters that are appropriately detailed. This information enables children to gain an insight into their birth families and their reasons for adoption.
56. Adopters are highly complimentary of the support that they receive from social workers throughout their journey. Preparation, recruitment and training are a strength, enabling positive matching and placing of children. Adoption support both before and after placement is viewed by adopters as being of a high quality. They report that support and training is accessible, with staff 'at the end of the phone should you need help'.
57. Adopters and their children know about their adoption entitlements. Families that need specific support have a comprehensive assessment that is detailed and with clear recommendations. The adoption support fund is accessed regularly, and any funding is matched by the local authority. This level of financial support enables access to targeted support as well as the wide range of resources available, including psychologists, counselling, and therapeutic support and activity groups for children of all ages.

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

58. Care leavers value their access to a stable, well-established and highly experienced team of personal advisers (PAs), who successfully meet their individual needs well. The advisers use their skills to good effect and work tirelessly on behalf of all the 158 young people entrusted to their care. Young people quickly build up stable, trusting and productive relationships that extend throughout their formative years. Advisers provide a responsive and flexible service by being available out of hours to support young people at times of crisis and need. Care leavers greatly appreciate this broad range of support. As one young person put it, 'If it wasn't for my PA, I don't think I would have survived.'
59. The local authority actively listens and is very quick to respond to the views and concerns expressed by care leavers through the 'Children's and young people's voice' group. For example, following representation, it provided all children in care and leaving care with a leisure membership card that gives them free access to a wide range of health, leisure and fitness facilities across the borough. Care leavers' involvement in the 'Total respect' programme provides both council and partner agency staff with important insights into their experiences of being in care and how the services provided for them might be further improved.
60. The quality of pathway plans is generally good, and management oversight is robust. In the best plans, the voice of the care leaver was clear, and had a clear identification of how their individual support needs were going to be met within achievable and realistic timescales. Information in these plans shows careful consideration to supporting young people's transition, for example through the early involvement of partner agencies, particularly in relation to accommodation, health and education. In the small minority of plans that required improvement, targets were not specific enough regarding plans for the future.
61. Care leavers, including those who are expectant mothers, have good access to a range of health services. Personal advisers ensure that young people maintain regular contact with a range of health professionals who closely monitor their health and well-being. All care leavers have access to their full health histories. Some of the young people told inspectors of a slow response to requests for key identity documents.
62. Health support is good for care leavers who have learning difficulties and disabilities as well as other health needs, but transition planning is poor. A range of effective partnerships between therapeutic health services, locally and across the region, ensure that these children receive focused support and services that are appropriate to their needs.

63. Care leavers benefit from smooth and effective handovers at the point of transition, when responsibility for their care transfers from social workers to PAs. Care leavers are supported by their PAs and foster carers to undertake a preparation for independence programme that helps them to develop the skills to cope with the demands of living independently. However, young people who spoke to inspectors commented that the timing of the programme, which starts close to their 16th birthdays, was a distraction during their GCSE examination preparations.
64. Local data shows that the majority (57%) of care leavers over 18 are in education, employment and training (EET), and for those under 18 it is higher (74%). The numbers of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are increasing. However, there are suitable plans to address this through volunteering and coaching schemes. Good support is available for care leavers who attend university.
65. To support care leavers into work with training, six apprenticeships have been recently ring-fenced by the council following feedback from the 'Children's and young people's voice' group, but care leavers said that they would like more opportunities to apply for a broader range of apprenticeships. While the local authority is committed to offering work placements and work experience opportunities for its care leavers who are not yet ready for an apprenticeship, there is not yet a consistent corporate approach to increasing the work offer to this vulnerable group. (Recommendation)
66. The successes of care leavers are celebrated well through an annual awards event that includes high-level representation and participation from senior council officials and elected members. Young people are proud of themselves, their achievements and the skills that they have gained. These are well celebrated through a range of awards, for example academic achievements, becoming parents, managing difficult situations, and football and coaching certificates.
67. Care leavers receive regular and helpful support from their PAs that helps them to understand their financial rights and entitlements, such as the leaving care grant.
68. Care leavers benefit from access to a good range of accommodation options that encompass both supported lodgings and a range of commissioned private and local authority housing that is identified as suitable for care leavers. Almost all care leavers (94%) live in suitable accommodation or stay put with their foster carers past 18 years of age. At the time of the inspection, no young people were homeless, living in bed and breakfast or houses in multiple occupancy. Care leavers told inspectors that they feel safe in their accommodation.

Leadership, management and governance	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>The director of children’s services (DCS) and her senior management team have focused well on improving children’s services since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. This has included developing a framework for social work practice that is based on a recognition of the risks and strengths within families and on ensuring that the voice of the child is at the centre of all decision-making. Inspectors saw some very good services that are making a real difference to children’s lives, often shaped and developed by the views of children and the learning from external review.</p> <p>In 2016, councillors removed £2.5 million from the children’s services budget. In particular, this impacted on staffing and recruitment: social workers’ caseloads rose and were too high, and supervision became less frequent, in particular in the assessment teams. This resulted in too much variability in practice and delays in work being completed for some children. Other work related to safeguarding and looked after children remained good. The DCS raised her concerns with the council and invited a peer review. This work was completed in December 2016 and identified that good work was being delivered. However, it confirmed that the staffing issues were having a negative impact on some children and their families. The Local Safeguarding Children Board called an emergency meeting in January 2017 and the council agreed to reinstate the budget. The financial resources were returned to children’s services in May 2017. This has led, in the last four months, to improvements in staffing and management oversight which have resulted in reduced caseloads, some better supervision and an increased timeliness of work.</p> <p>Throughout her five years in post, the DCS has had an accurate view of the strengths and areas of weakness in children’s services. There is much evidence of her and her team working to continually improve and develop those services deemed to be good, simultaneously addressing the pockets of social work practice that need improvement. There is strong corporate parenting, successfully responding to the voices of children in care and promoting high aspirations and ambitions for children. Even throughout 2016–17, considerable work was undertaken to further improve services for children while trying to ameliorate the impact of the budget reductions. Detailed and regular management information has helped managers to understand the performance of their services, although it has been less effective in capturing the qualitative experiences of children, essential to drive forward service development.</p> <p>All of the social workers who met inspectors reported that they enjoy working for Blackburn with Darwen, and that they are receiving good support from senior managers, their managers and colleagues and other agencies. They report that services have improved and, as a result, their morale is high.</p>	

Inspection findings

69. Since the last inspection in 2012, a committed and passionate director of children's services (DCS) has advocated for children's services against a backdrop of financial challenge and competing priorities in the council. The DCS and her senior leadership team focused on delivering service improvements in response to the issues identified by Ofsted. Investment in a service-wide model of social work known as the 'risk sensible' approach resulted in improvements in the assessment, planning and delivery of support for children across services. Twenty-four service areas successfully qualified for the Investors in Children award, putting the voice of children and their families at the centre of decision-making.
70. However, the progress of the improvement journey has not been smooth. Since 2016, there has been a dip in performance in areas of help and protection. This is due to a significant increase in demand, including in referrals, assessments, and numbers subject to a child protection plan and children becoming looked after. The council also reduced the budget for children's services by 16%, much more than comparator authorities had done. This meant that children's services had to manage increasing demand for services with the same or reducing levels of resource in some parts of the service. In practice, this resulted in much good work continuing, but there was too much variability in the quality of practice from social workers who were struggling with too high caseloads, particularly in the assessment teams. The impact for families was that the support was variable and that there was some drift for children in situations of chronic neglect.
71. The DCS reports twice yearly to safeguarding assurance meetings with the leader of the council, lead member for children, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) chair and the chief executive. Through these arrangements, the DCS has challenged the cuts in resources to children's services. Inspectors saw reports to the council written by the DCS that identified well the potential impact of these budget reductions. A peer review was invited, and it reported in December 2016. Subsequently, the LSCB called an emergency meeting to address these issues. Following the challenges from senior officers, the LSCB and the findings of the peer review, political leaders reinstated the £2.5 million that had been removed from the children's services budget. Inspectors were reassured by council leaders that resources would continue to be available for children's social care to ensure that children are properly protected. The council is committed to providing sufficient resources to enable high-quality support. (Recommendation)
72. The DCS and her management team have made concerted efforts to address the increased demand and the service deficiencies. They have tightened the processes at the 'front door' with partner agencies, and this has been effective in steadying demand. Staffing is becoming more stable, with an increase in permanent team managers and social workers. A restructure in the assessment and safeguarding service and a refocus of the management team have

improved the quality of short-term work. Assertive action to reduce workloads is now also having a positive impact. Over the last four months, this has resulted in improvements and more consistently good and timely responses for children in need of support.

73. Preventative services are a key priority for Blackburn with Darwen Council. The chief executive leads a clear strategic vision of early intervention through all service areas working alongside children's services. Eight designated children's centres continue to be at the forefront of multi-agency partnership work, which includes integrating the delivery of health visiting and school nursing from those centres.
74. Political and senior leaders champion the needs of children in their care, promoting corporate responsibilities among chief officers. The council is ambitious for its care leavers, who are given preferential opportunities for housing options and apprenticeships. There is a strong commitment to participation and hearing directly from children. The corporate parenting board includes members of the youth parliament and 'Children's and young people's voice', the Children in Care Council.
75. Excellent participation and involvement of children in care, as well as evaluative feedback from children and families, inform service development. There are effective processes to communicate with children and families who use services, for example the 'Leapfrog' project, which helped to design tools for communication and engaging children at reviews. There is also an accessible complaints and compliments service, with demonstrable evidence of individual children and their carers receiving better-focused support as a result. The Investors in Children award for all social work teams demonstrates that this is well established.
76. The local authority meets its sufficiency duty. Regional frameworks support commissioning of independent placements that meet children's needs well. The successful placement of the majority of children and young people close to the borough means that they enjoy high-quality leisure opportunities and accommodation that supports them to do well. Regular review and oversight by senior managers of children in commissioned placements ensure that their needs are visible. The very small number of children who live at a distance receive good support.
77. Managers were well aware of the strengths and deficiencies of their services prior to this inspection. Feedback from regular internal audit activity and an independent peer review by the local government association have informed a streamlined business plan that focuses on improving social work practice and addressing weaker areas of performance.
78. Strategies for children and families are aligned within the council and its partners through the Health and Well-being Board. Comprehensive needs analysis and joint approaches have resulted in effective and valued support

services in the borough for children and families affected by domestic abuse and substance misuse.

79. Strategic plans to invest in extra capacity for social workers and more investment in new services are underway. Extra social work support, targeted at safeguarding and assessment teams, has provided more capacity to reduce caseloads. A team of advanced practitioners, who do not hold cases but support less-experienced staff, has improved practice and outcomes for children. Investment in restorative practice through the expansion of the multi-agency family group conferencing team focuses well on supporting children to remain within family networks.
80. Performance reporting is widely available and detailed to support managers in delivering their services. However, this has over-focused on general trends in data analysis and not on the experiences of children and young people. (Recommendation)
81. The local authority has a good, overarching policy on supervision, with several layers of support. The 'best practice' team, led by the principal social worker, supports new staff and managers alike. It leads the induction and mentoring processes and offers six-weekly reflective supervision. The team provides weekly workshops, which are useful training opportunities to develop practice. There are three different supervision systems for staff, namely case management, reflective and personal supervision. In principle, this offers strong support for individual workers. However, due to the workload pressures on workers and managers, it has not been possible to deliver to these standards. Case management is evident on case files, and the DCS and senior managers make concerted efforts to know all of the managers and workers. Social workers speak very highly of working for Blackburn with Darwen, including the support available from their managers, their team colleagues and partner agencies. The timeliness and depth of formal supervision, and how this is recorded, have not been consistent, mirroring the work pressures experienced within particular teams. (Recommendation)
82. The workforce strategy focuses on developing experienced, high-quality social workers and managers through strong training and development opportunities. A focused recruitment drive has attracted new permanent staff, and turnover rates for social workers and managers for the current year have been greatly reduced, from 30% to 13% at the time of the inspection. Attracting students and supporting them to apply for permanent posts have been successful. The use of the advanced practitioner posts ensures the retention of more experienced staff and bolsters the support in teams.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

The Blackburn with Darwen's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is meeting its statutory responsibilities, with strong governance arrangements that support and promote high-quality safeguarding services from partner agencies to children and their families. It is a proactive and responsive coordinating board, with effective linkages to other strategic bodies. A very experienced and determined chair leads the board.

The LSCB has used its extensive audit activity, the learning from serious case reviews (SCRs) and national research to plan its priorities and training for partner agencies effectively. Learning is disseminated well, particularly through the use of multi-professional discussion forums (MPDFs) for frontline practitioners. This opportunity for analysing practice and decision-making creates a strong multi-agency safeguarding culture. A range of training to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, female genital mutilation, modern slavery and trafficking, and domestic abuse reflect the board's priorities and community needs well. The effective training delivered to practitioners by the board is a strength, and is one that can evidence a positive impact for children as a result of the training.

Children and young people are increasingly being seen as important partners in both shaping and informing the priorities of the board. For example, the 'Amplify champions' groups in secondary schools disseminate the board's messages of the dangers of child sexual exploitation and the radicalisation of young people.

The LSCB chair has regular meetings with the chief executive and the director of children's services. In the main, the LSCB has a good knowledge of the strengths and the areas needing further development in partner agencies. It appropriately challenged the local authority following the publication of the peer review by calling an emergency meeting in January 2017. The intervention of the chair of the LSCB, along with the DCS, was instrumental in the reinstatement of £2.5 million to the children's social care budget. However, the board was not fully aware of some of the issues identified during the inspection and therefore did not challenge or seek ways to agree how the board could further support the local authority. The LSCB has strong partnership commitment, with senior managers from partner agencies sharing some of the sub-group chairing responsibilities. Partners demonstrate a clear focus on scrutiny of performance and challenge each other when shortfalls in practice or provision impact on the safety of children. Lay membership recruitment is an acknowledged difficulty for the board and attendance at a small number of sub-groups is limited. The annual report for 2016–17 has yet to be published, and this does not assist in planning for this year.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) continues to have a good understanding of the resource challenges faced by agencies and how these impact on the individual experiences of children and their families.
- Ensure that there is good participation throughout the LSCB by expediting lay member recruitment and improving attendance at sub-groups.
- Consider the timing of publication of the annual report to assist in planning and delivering priorities with partner agencies.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

83. The Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) has made continuing improvements since the current independent chair came into post in April 2013. Her experience and expertise in LSCB chairing roles have resulted in an effective review and redesign of the LSCB’s oversight and audit priorities. The LSCB fulfils its statutory functions and has effective governance arrangements.
84. The LSCB and the local safeguarding adult board share a chairperson and a business group that oversee progression of board activity. Seven work groups focus on specific issues and conduct development work in key areas, such as workforce development, communication and engagement, child sexual exploitation and quality assurance. A range of reviews and reports are received and evaluated annually by the board, including those from the local authority designated officer service and the independent reviewing officer service, and missing from care and home reports. These reports enable the board to keep abreast of progress or concerns for children either in need of early help or in the care of the local authority.
85. The chair leads the board in being both appropriately responsive and proactive. A culture of constructive challenge has resulted in the effective use of ‘table top’ learning events following serious case reviews, serious incident notifications and audit activity. This enables partners to understand better the impact of shortfalls in their area of service delivery, sharing of good practice and collaborative decision-making for further service development.
86. Regular meetings with the chair, director of children’s services (DCS) and the chief executive support key board issues being made clear. The chair’s meetings with the chief executive are well minuted. They demonstrate clear evidence of challenge and discussion of any potential safeguarding risks.
87. The majority of board members attend meetings regularly and are committed to progressing the work of the board. The progress of action plans and activity is scrutinised by clear partnership challenge, when necessary. Financial

contributions from partner agencies remain in line with the previous year to secure the work of the board and its training commitments. Strong working relationships are further demonstrated by the involvement of agencies outside of the council, such as Training 2000 and Blackburn College sharing the sub-group chairing responsibilities. However, attendance is irregular at a small number of sub-groups, and a lack of success in the recruitment of a second lay member potentially compromises the board's fuller understanding of local issues and its ability to share the learning from its activities. (Recommendation)

88. The LSCB has made some good progress in engaging with children and young people to increase the public understanding of the work of the board. Recent initiatives have utilised meetings with 'Amplify champions' and the adolescent strategy survey to gain views of children and young people on abuse, risky behaviours, crime and anti-social behaviour and family breakdowns. 'Amplify champions' in secondary schools have also worked with the LSCB to ensure that safeguarding messages are reaching target audiences via the most current social media platforms.
89. The majority of LSCB policies and procedures are developed as part of the pan-Lancashire safeguarding procedures. They are appropriate and clear, and are updated regularly to reflect emerging risks and concerns. Agencies that also have a pan-Lancashire remit, such as the Lancashire Constabulary, are well supported by this consistency of approach.
90. The LSCB's audit and performance monitoring is well targeted to understand performance and to drive improvement in the quality and impact of services. For example, the creative approach to the multi-agency review of domestic abuse support has led to the new domestic abuse hub.
91. The use of a multi-agency audit tool, quality assurance performance management (QAPM), enables the LSCB to receive increasingly consistent and regular responses from partner agencies regarding their respective performance. The QA sub-group closely monitors these returns, and this enables board partners to challenge each other about performance deficits and implement improvements. However, the recent lack of QAPM responses from the local authority's legal services has not fully alerted the LSCB to the lack of capacity in the legal team. There were issues identified during this inspection that the LSCB was not fully aware of, and therefore was unable to challenge or seek out ways in which the partnership could further support the local authority. One example of this is the drift and delay experienced by children in pre-proceedings. (Recommendation)
92. Three serious case reviews (SCRs) were commissioned in the past year, in accordance with statutory criteria and correctly applied thresholds. The SCR consideration panel, in order to ensure that the best model is matched to circumstances in the future, has recently assessed the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the 'Significant incident learning process' models. This flexibility of approach supports better understanding of agency action and decision-

making. Any planned delay in the publication of reviews is approved by the board and is usually because of coroner and criminal investigations. The LSCB has already ensured that the learning from the SCRs has been appropriately cascaded to all agencies using a series of learning events, team briefings, 'seven-minute bulletins' and safeguarding snapshots. In the past year, the highly effective use of MPDFs to disseminate messages from SCRs and other learning reviews and audit activity has focused agency practice on the dangers of child sexual exploitation, injuries and bruising in non-mobile children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and modern slavery and trafficking. These themes reflect the board's priorities and are particularly pertinent to the Blackburn with Darwen community.

93. The board provides a broad range of relevant training. Comprehensive training plans for the coming year reflect the range of learning from SCRs, section 11 and wider audit activity and QAPMs. The LSCB also responds quickly when the prioritisation of emerging risks and concerns requires supplementing by multi-agency training. Evaluations of training by course participants, with subsequent follow up by surveys of participants' line managers, show increased confidence and competence in safeguarding practice in the majority of attendees.
94. The LSCB child sexual exploitation and missing children committee provides effective strategic oversight and monitoring to assist the coordination of partners' efforts to identify and support victims of exploitation and issues relating to online safeguarding, modern slavery and 'county lines' safeguarding. The activities of the 'Engage' team are well scrutinised by the board to ensure that the team's increasing workload is supported by partnership coordination. This has ensured that there is a shared and intelligence-led focus on perpetrators, trends and the identification of hotspots.
95. The increasing local risks from radicalisation are recognised by the board and well integrated into wider safeguarding work. Effective membership of the 'Prevent' steering group and strong 'Channel' panel coordination inform training content and development, while countering other vulnerabilities such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and children going missing. The impact of the culturally sensitive training presented to the majority of mosques and madrasa by the LSCB business manager has reinforced the inherent dangers and the constant need for vigilance to protect children and young people. Training has been delivered to senior leaders in neighbouring authorities in line with Blackburn with Darwen's commitment to pan-Lancashire training. This is a noteworthy area of strength for the LSCB and, as a result of the training in this area, there has been increased awareness, demonstrating the impact of the targeted and effective training by the LSCB on improving children's experiences.
96. The pan-Lancashire child death overview panel (CDOP) is a sub-group of the three LSCBs (Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire County Council). Arrangements for the overview of Blackburn with Darwen child deaths are well established, supported by an effective rota system at panel to enable

analysis of specific local concerns. CDOP uses a range of information and research to identify and act on areas for review, action and learning. Current interim charring arrangements are sufficiently robust to ensure that responses to child deaths remain timely. The new chair is due in post in November 2017. In Blackburn with Darwen, a comprehensive package of genetic counselling support and a 'safer sleeping' campaign reflect the ongoing detailed analysis of both expected and unexpected child deaths. Of those considered, 77% of cases in Blackburn with Darwen are completed in under 12 months, compared to 70% nationally.

97. The board's website is clear and user friendly. Helpful information and advice on the prevalent dangers of child sexual exploitation, online safety and 'sexting' ensure that up-to-date knowledge is shared. The annual report for 2016–17 has yet to be published. This is not timely and does not assist in joint planning with partner agencies. (Recommendation).

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and one additional inspector.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Neil Penswick HMI

Deputy lead inspector: Caroline Walsh HMI

Team inspectors: Paula Thomson-Jones HMI, Dawn Godfrey HMI, Andy Waugh HMI, Victor Reid HMI, Stella Elliott HMI, Pam Blackman OI

Shadow inspectors: Christine Taylor HMI designate

Senior data analyst: Clare Atkinson, Peter McLaughlin

Quality assurance manager: Christine Williams SHMI

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