

establishment of a permanent and stable senior leadership team. The council has prioritised investment in a number of services for children that include:

- the integrated locality offer
- building a stable, secure and skilled workforce
- the implementation of a new electronic case recording system.

The social work model is well embedded. It supports social workers and family support workers in delivering robust and effective interventions in families.

What needs to improve

Services for some children are not yet good:

- The council has not been tenacious enough in sustaining contact and support for a small but significant number of care leavers. The current circumstances of these care leavers are unknown and therefore the local authority is not able to provide support if this is needed.
- The council do not respond robustly enough when young people present as homeless.
- The council does not always fully understand the reasons why children go missing and therefore does not always give children the help that they need.
- Independent reviewing officers do not have the capacity to sufficiently monitor the progress of children's plans between review meetings.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection are good

1. A wide range of effective early help services for children and their families minimises risks and improves children's welfare. Early help and targeted services are now based in the children and families direct team – the 'front door' of children's services. This means that children who do not require a social work response, but who still have needs, are referred to a wide range of more suitable services. Consequently, very few referrals to children's services result in no further action.
2. Effective early help assessments and plans with appropriately managed 'step across' arrangements are resulting in positive outcomes. A range of effective services such as multi systemic therapy, emotional health and well-being support and targeted family support are helping families and reducing risks to children.
3. Partners use the recently revised multi-agency request form consistently well to communicate their concerns and make referrals. They respond to contacts quickly and there are no delays on clearly identified safeguarding cases.

10. The help and protection offered to children by the Disabled Children's Team is effective. Sensitive work leads to tailored packages of support for children and their families. Social workers in the Disabled Children's Team identify and respond to emerging welfare needs and risks appropriately.
11. The multi-agency child sexual exploitation panel (MASE) offers a valuable response to all children who are at risk of sexual exploitation. There are a small number of children who are at significant risk of child sexual exploitation; these children are appropriately made subjects of child protection plans. The impact of planning and support for these children is further monitored in MASE, where a RAG (red amber green) rating system is used to identify those children at highest risk. A range of services, including voluntary agencies, provide 'wraparound' support. They are contributing to the protection and support of children from being identified to, when necessary, becoming children looked after.
12. Staff do not consistently carry out return home interviews when children go missing, including children looked after. They therefore do not explore the reasons why children go missing, which limits their ability to construct and implement appropriate risk management plans. Managers do not oversee return home interviews consistently or effectively enough.
13. Leaders and managers make sure that the out-of-hours emergency duty service is appropriately resourced. Staff ensure that responses to children who go missing and child protection episodes that arise overnight or at weekends are timely, thorough and clearly documented. The service recently moved to the police headquarters because senior leaders recognise that improving communication outside of normal working hours will further strengthen the response to children, particularly when child protection concerns arise.
14. Children who are privately fostered are appropriately identified. The fostering arrangements are assessed and allocated family support workers visit children and their carers regularly to ensure that any emerging needs or risks are responded to. Family support workers establish positive relationships with the children and their carers.
15. Local authority arrangements for considering allegations or concerns about paid employees or volunteers working with children are effective. Referrals from a wide range of organisations show the high levels of engagement across the professional network. Records of strategy meetings and clarity of actions and recommendations are of a consistently high standard.
16. The response to young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless is inconsistent. Some young people receive high levels of support, while others are not suitably assessed. As a result, the local authority cannot be certain that staff have identified and met the needs of all young people at risk of homelessness, including those who should become looked after.