

Bracknell Forest

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: 28 April 2017 to 25 May 2017

Report published: 14 July 2017

| Children's services in Bracknell Forest are good | | |
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| 1. Children who need help and protection | | Good |
| 2. Children looked after and achieving permanence | | Outstanding |
| | 2.1 Adoption performance | Outstanding |
| | 2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers | Outstanding |
| 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

Children in Bracknell Forest benefit from highly aspirational, committed senior managers and political leaders who place them firmly at the centre of their decision making. As a result, almost every child who accesses a service receives good or outstanding support. This determination and focus to build upon strengths and to address shortfalls has ensured that progress has been sustained and services have improved since the last safeguarding and children looked after inspection in 2011.

The importance of a stable, well-trained and dedicated workforce is well understood by leaders in Bracknell Forest. A focus on strategies to achieve this has resulted in an increasingly stable and experienced workforce. As a result, children benefit from effective relationships with their social workers, and their needs are well understood and planned for. The quality of direct work undertaken with children is strong, and the voice of the child is evident throughout their assessments and reviews, informing plans.

Performance management is well established. There is regular scrutiny of data and consideration of progress against priorities by the Children, Young People and Learning and Scrutiny panel, corporate parenting advisory panel and safeguarding children monitoring meetings, and this demonstrates the authority's clear determination to improve outcomes for children. Action has been taken to strengthen performance management and quality assurance processes. However, there is still more to do to understand the effectiveness of early help.

Management oversight is regular, and inspectors saw good examples of analytical case supervision, ensuring that children's plans progress effectively. However, this has not yet been effective in reducing drift and delay for a small minority of children, in particular at the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline.

Young people who present as homeless are promptly assessed and given appropriate support. However, the literature is not sufficiently clear to help young people to understand their entitlements, and it was not evident from case records how their rights had been explained to them.

Partnership working in Bracknell Forest is a strength, at both the strategic and the operational level. Inspectors saw numerous examples of this, including the introduction of the MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub), which delivers timely responses to referrals, the 'Life chances' team which is improving placement stability and the contribution of partners to children's reviews. However, not all strategy discussions involve relevant partner agencies, and this means that decisions are made without all available information.

There is an effective response to children at risk of child sexual exploitation, and the procedures are well understood by partner agencies that are committed to ensuring that risk is reduced. There are well-coordinated services for children who are missing from home or care. Return home interviews are timely and of a good quality,

informing both individual and strategic plans. Procedures to identify children missing from education are well understood by schools and are used effectively. There were no children missing education at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after, adopted children and young people leaving care are provided with outstanding care and support. Dedicated, experienced staff and carers, who are highly ambitious for children, work together to ensure that children remain safe and achieve in life.

Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are strong and effective champions for children. They know the children well, undertaking monitoring and visiting between reviews, and ensure that plans progress without delay. The use of child-friendly language in review reports ensures that children remain at the centre of planning and explains with sensitivity why children are in care. It is entirely clear to children what will happen next and when it will happen, and who is responsible for progressing aspects of their plan.

The virtual school, led by a highly effective headteacher, has an embedded culture of supporting all children to achieve their potential. The school's creative and tenacious work leads to good attainment for the majority of children. High-quality personal education plans (PEPs) reflect this aspirational yet realistic ambition and are well understood by the children, and there is good engagement from relevant partners at reviews.

Creative direct work and life appreciation days help children looked after to understand their life histories. Foster carers engage in collecting information for life-story work and adopters are involved in completing life-journey books, which helps them to support their children in understanding their histories. However, the quality of life-journey books is not consistently good.

Elected members have high aspirations for children looked after and care leavers. Aspirations are translated into concrete action to improve children and young people's lives, for example exempting care leavers living in Bracknell Forest from paying council tax.

Corporate parenting arrangements are very strong, and purposeful engagement with children ensures that their views are well understood. The work of the Children in Care Council, 'Say it loud, say it proud', is outstanding. It champions the views of all children looked after and care leavers, and has a real influence which results in positive change for children looked after.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates one children's home, which was judged to be outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection.
- The last inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in December 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The last inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in December 2011. The local authority was judged to be good.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since October 2016.
- The chief executive has been in post since April 2003.
- The chair of the local safeguarding children board has been in post since September 2011.
- The local authority uses the Signs of Safety model of social work.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 28,158 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Bracknell Forest. This is 23.7% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 10% of the local authority's children are living in poverty.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 8% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 7% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 13% 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 at 6% and dual heritage at 5%.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 14% (the national average is 20%)
 - in secondary schools is 10% (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.

Child protection in this area

- At 28 April 2017, 928 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is an increase from 839 at 31 March 2016.
- At 28 April 2017, 171 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 60.6 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 115 (41 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 28 April 2017, two children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from three at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years before inspection, three serious incident notifications were submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review was completed. There were no serious case reviews ongoing at the time of inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 28 April 2017, 123 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 44 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 100 (35 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
 - Of this number, 57 (or 46%) live outside the local authority area
 - 19 live in residential children's homes, and 16 (84%) live out of the authority area
 - One lives in a residential special school,³ which is out of the authority area
 - 89 live with foster families, of whom 32 (36%) live out of the authority area
 - Two live with parents, and neither live out of the authority area
 - Three children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been three adoptions
 - 13 children became subject to special guardianship orders
 - 50 children ceased to be looked after, none of whom subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 16 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

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

Recommendations

1. Ensure that performance management systems support the evaluation of the effectiveness of early help services in order to inform future planning and commissioning arrangements.
2. Ensure that all relevant partner agencies contribute to strategy discussions in order for decision making to be based on collective sharing of information.
3. Improve the quality of case management oversight by team managers and child protection chairs, to reduce the drift and delay experienced by some children.
4. Ensure that homeless young people have their rights and entitlements fully explained to them so that they can make an informed choice.
5. Improve the quality of life-journey books so that children can better understand their histories.

Summary for children and young people

- Children and families in Bracknell Forest receive good and sometimes excellent services. The councillors and managers really want children to do well, and they make decisions that put children first.
- When children and families need help, there are plenty of services available and, in almost all cases, children receive the right help at the right time. Inspectors found that a small number of children should have been looked after sooner in order to keep them safe. Managers recognised this and had already made changes to stop this happening in future.
- Social workers spend time getting to know children well. When children can't say how they feel, for example if they are too young or have disabilities and cannot talk very easily, social workers find really imaginative ways to make sure that they understand children's views.
- When children have gone missing, they are quickly seen by professionals who try to understand why they ran away and help them so that they don't run away again. Professionals in Bracknell Forest work hard to help children and adults to understand the risks of sexual exploitation. Police, social workers and other adults work together well to help children who are sexually exploited or who may be at risk of being exploited.
- Social workers help children to live at home with their families if it is safe for them to do so. If it's not safe for children to stay with their families, they are well looked after by foster carers or by the staff of the children's home that they live in. Foster carers gave inspectors plenty of examples of how they helped children to have fun.
- Social workers and other adults listen to children and take their views into account when they make important decisions about children's lives. Independent

reviewing officers (IROs) visit children between their reviews and make sure that plans for children happen when they are supposed to, so that children have the support that they need.

- Bracknell Forest's Children in Care Council, 'Say it loud, say it proud', has been hugely successful in helping councillors and managers to understand what it is like to be looked after. This has meant that some things have been changed, because adults understand better what is important to children looked after and care leavers.
- When children need to be adopted, Bracknell Forest works very hard to find the right families for them. Families who adopt have plenty of helpful support so that they can help their children to understand their past and enjoy their future.
- Young people who are leaving care receive excellent support from their personal advisers. They put young people in touch with other people who help them to become independent, find a job or continue their learning. Advisers are regularly in touch with every single care leaver, and this is very good.

| The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection | Good |
|---|------|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Services to safeguard children in Bracknell Forest are good. Children and their families benefit from an extensive range of well-coordinated, multi-agency support, including from children's centres and targeted youth services. This is helping to support children and families at the earliest opportunity. However, the impact of early help needs to be more fully understood. The arrangements to escalate children's cases to social care when risks increase are robust.</p> <p>A good understanding of the thresholds for access to children's social care means that most referrals are appropriate and timely. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) ensures a prompt response to referrals, in the majority of cases. However, the practice of undertaking visits to determine threshold has led to delays in accessing a statutory social work intervention, for a small number of children.</p> <p>Children at risk of immediate harm are responded to well. Strategy discussions take place promptly and result in appropriate outcomes. However, the majority do not include all relevant agencies. Child protection conferences are timely and well attended by partner agencies. However, slow progress against actions for a small number of children is contributing to drift and delay at the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline (PLO).</p> <p>The majority of assessments are comprehensive and analytical. They make good use of research to inform practice, reducing risks. However, management oversight of the common assessment framework (CAF) is not consistently leading to sufficient focus on outcomes for children. Social workers are extremely</p> | |

knowledgeable about the children whom they are working with and use a wide range of creative, effective direct work to understand the views and circumstances of children. The majority of plans are well focused and reviewed regularly, and have appropriate partner agency contributions.

The response to concerns is effective where children are exposed to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or parental mental ill health. The arrangements for identifying and responding to children at risk of sexual exploitation, or children missing from home or school, are excellent and there are clear arrangements to ensure a multi-agency response to prevent harm.

The assessment and provision for homeless 16- to 17-year-olds are appropriate, but young people do not always receive information about their rights and entitlements.

Inspection findings

6. Children and their families in Bracknell Forest receive help when their needs and concerns are first identified, with effective escalation to statutory services if required. Families have access to an array of well-structured and timely early help, provided by a range of committed professionals, that includes access to children's centres and targeted youth services. Examples of children's centres services include groups for parents and children who have experienced domestic abuse. The pathway into targeted early help provision is clear. Fortnightly early intervention meetings coordinate packages of support and ensure that children are receiving timely and appropriate support which meets their assessed need.
7. Early help is underpinned by a coherent strategy. A range of services are available to support parents experiencing mental ill health, domestic abuse or substance misuse. Parenting support, delivered by the family intervention team, and effective multi-agency partnership working result in good access to appropriate services, improving outcomes for children. The majority of CAFs are comprehensive, although some focus too heavily on the needs of parents, do not include the voice of the child and provide limited analysis. The local authority recognises that there is more to do to strengthen systems to measure the impact of early help interventions. (Recommendation)
8. Thresholds are well embedded and applied consistently, in most cases, resulting in proportionate action to protect children. When concerns for children are raised with children's social care, the MASH provides an effective and timely response. Social work expertise and advice are available to support professionals. This is highly regarded by schools. Children who are at risk or who are in need of social work intervention are referred appropriately by partner agencies. Consent to share information is understood and appropriately sought. MASH processes are effective and the majority of children who require a statutory intervention receive a prompt transfer to the

duty and assessment team. However, not all notifications of domestic abuse involving children are received promptly, which means, for example, that schools are not alerted in a timely way. Senior managers have taken appropriate action to escalate this with the police. For a small number of children, the practice of visiting to determine the threshold has led to delays in timely social work intervention. Appropriate action was taken during the inspection to review MASH procedures and end this practice.

9. Strategy discussions are timely and result in swift actions and outcomes, but they lack the involvement of all relevant agencies. This means that the opportunity to share valuable information to inform decision making is limited. Child protection enquiries are of a consistently high standard. Social workers see children alone and there is a clear analysis of risks, and this leads to safe and proportionate decisions including child protection conferences, when necessary. (Recommendation)
10. The emergency duty team provides a timely and effective response to need outside office hours. The service is staffed by experienced social workers. There is good communication between the daytime and out-of-hours services, ensuring that information is shared effectively and concerns are responded to promptly.
11. Social workers and family support workers provide highly effective support to children in need of help and protection. Confident and skilled practitioners develop meaningful relationships with children. Children are seen regularly and alone, with practitioners undertaking a comprehensive range of direct work, which leads to reduced risk and improved outcomes. Inspectors saw excellent examples of imaginative ways of capturing children's views, including a range of tools and drawings to identify their wishes and feelings. Children are supported effectively to participate in planning processes through a variety of means, including a commissioned advocacy service. Arrangements for feedback from children and families regarding the effectiveness of the help that they have received is a real strength in Bracknell Forest. Feedback is consistently used to inform practice and service provision.
12. The vast majority of statutory assessments are of good quality, leading to clear plans. Risks and protective factors are identified and considered in the analysis. Assessments carefully consider family history (including chronologies and genograms), apply research, and comprehensively consider all aspects of children's lives, including their diverse needs.
13. Plans for children in need of help or protection recognise and identify the key risks, and the critical concerns and strengths. They are outcome focused and contain specific targeted actions and responsibilities, and most set clear timescales. Parents are frequently engaged well in meetings and reviews, and their views are considered and responded to respectfully. Multi-agency reviews track and monitor outcomes effectively, for the vast majority of

children. There is good attendance by partner agencies at review meetings. As a result, positive change is achieved and sustained for most children.

14. Slow progress against actions for a small number of children on child protection plans is contributing to drift and delay at the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. Recent action (in January 2017) by senior managers to address this has led to a revised process for reviewing children on plans. (Recommendation)
15. The majority of child in need plans are clear, with regular multi-agency reviews leading to good outcomes for children. The children specialist support team works enthusiastically and creatively to ensure that children's views are represented in assessments, plans and reviews. Experienced and well-trained social workers assess risk, and this results in clear plans to address the specific and diverse needs of this group of children.
16. Management oversight is thorough and clearly recorded in the majority of children's case files. However, supervision notes are not always detailed enough to measure progress against actions. Within the over-11's team, reflective group supervision arrangements enhance the effectiveness of management oversight.
17. The number of children subject to child protection plans (171) has increased by 33% since March 2016. The local authority commissioned an external review that found no specific reason for this increase. However, it continues to monitor it in order to recognise any further patterns. In all cases seen by inspectors, the decisions to convene child protection conferences were appropriately balanced and carefully evidenced. There is now additional scrutiny and evaluation by senior managers for all children who have been on child protection plans for nine months. This is preventing delay by parallel planning for those children for whom changes are not being sustained and children who remain at continued risk of harm.
18. Social workers demonstrate a good awareness of the impact on children of domestic abuse and have access to a range of specialist services, including the 'Freedomprogramme' for victims of domestic abuse and groups specifically for children. Inspectors saw examples of effective and creative individual direct work with children that has led to improved outcomes. A domestic abuse perpetrator service (DAPS) delivers one-to-one interventions and is a real strength, reducing repeat incidents of domestic abuse. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences are effective in sharing information, identifying risks and developing appropriate responses to protect children affected by domestic abuse. Good attendance by children's social care representatives at these and at multi-agency public protection meetings means that the risks to children are well understood and inform plans.
19. Collaborative work across agencies to reduce risk to children who are missing from home is good. All children are offered a return home interview. The take-

up is improving, and there is evidence of persistent, respectful work to engage young people effectively and help them to understand the risks involved. This has successfully reduced the number of episodes of them going missing. The identification, monitoring and tracking of children who go missing from school are effective. Clear and comprehensive policy and procedures ensure that reporting by schools is timely. At the time of this inspection, no children were missing education. The authority maintains a vigilant approach to those children who have previously gone missing and continues to monitor them, demonstrating a consistent commitment to some of the local authority's most vulnerable children.

20. Children at risk of sexual exploitation or missing from home receive highly effective, bespoke services, delivered sensitively by skilled workers who know them well. Professionals value and use the sexual exploitation screening tool effectively to support the identification of risk and to plan responses to meet the individual needs of children. The risks to children are reduced when they first emerge by targeted early help in an effective manner. The multi-agency arrangements of the sexual exploitation and missing risk assessment conferences (SEMRAC) ensure swift information sharing and action by all professionals, helping to protect children and disrupt perpetrators.
21. There is a clear protocol among partners to identify those children who may be at risk of radicalisation, with processes to respond to it. Workshops to raise awareness of 'Prevent' (WRAP) have taken place in all schools. Multi-agency safeguarding training on 'Prevent', female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and honour-based violence ensures that these topics are kept live and demonstrates the authority's commitment to protecting all children, despite the low incidence of these risks in Bracknell Forest.
22. The assessment and provision for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are appropriate. Young people's needs are comprehensively assessed and they are provided with suitable accommodation if they cannot be supported to return to their families. However, not all young people are informed about their rights and entitlements, and an information leaflet explaining these, including the right to become looked after by the local authority, is not written in child-friendly language. (Recommendation)
23. The management of allegations against people who work with children is effective. Responses to allegations are timely, and appropriate actions are taken to safeguard children in Bracknell Forest. The authority has recently reviewed and redesigned its model of tracking, monitoring and analysing data to inform future training and awareness raising for partners.

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| The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence | Outstanding |
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Children looked after, adopted children and young people leaving care in Bracknell Forest receive outstanding care and support. They all benefit from teams of highly committed, ambitious and determined professionals who work extremely well together, helping children to remain safe and achieve in life. The local authority is dedicated to pursuing adoption for all children, including those for whom it is considered harder to find adoptive parents. Enthusiastic, dedicated personal advisers stay in touch with all care leavers and support them to live in safe and suitable accommodation.</p> <p>When children become looked after, decision making is timely and prompt action is taken, ensuring that children have good-quality, stable homes if they cannot live with their families. Social workers know children well, and most children are able to build trusting relationships with the same worker over a period of time. Inspectors found excellent examples of effective, sensitive and skilled direct work that helps children to understand their experiences.</p> <p>The work of the independent reviewing officers (IROs) is highly effective. IROs bring additional rigour to the quality of planning by visiting and monitoring children between reviews and ensuring that plans for children progress without delay. IROs write child-friendly review reports in plain language, making sure that children fully understand why they are in care, what will happen next and who is responsible for carrying out the actions in their plans.</p> <p>Every child and young person has a comprehensive care plan which is updated prior to every review and is clearly linked to their assessed needs. The work of the virtual school is outstanding. Relentless scrutiny by the virtual school headteacher means that educational outcomes for children are consistently good. Children in care have 100% of their health assessments and 93% of their dental checks completed on time.</p> <p>The work of the Children in Care Council, 'Say it loud, say it proud' (SiLSiP), is outstanding in championing the views of all children looked after and care leavers.</p> <p>Children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, or who go missing from home or care, receive well-coordinated, bespoke services which are delivered sensitively by skilled workers and help to reduce risks.</p> | |

Inspection findings

24. Children looked after in Bracknell Forest benefit from excellent help and support from highly committed, ambitious caring professionals. Staff at all levels work tirelessly to help children to achieve in life and protect them from further harm. Consequently, the majority (123 are in care at the time of this inspection) are making very good progress.
25. Children are visited often and seen alone, with 98% of visits within expected timescales. Social workers know children well, with most being able to build trusting relationships with the same worker over a period of time. Inspectors found excellent examples of effective, sensitive and skilled direct work helping children to understand their experiences. Social workers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) work diligently to support children to express their views. Significant effort is made to engage with all children, including those with additional needs. Case recording is clear and up to date, and the voice of the child is consistently evidenced.
26. Assessments are updated regularly. They are child-centred, comprehensive and analytical, and lead to children being protected from harm and receiving appropriately focused help. When children no longer need to be looked after by the local authority, they return home safely to their birth families with comprehensive support plans, which are regularly monitored by relevant professionals.
27. Social workers attend court having undertaken all necessary assessments to support robust and well-resourced care packages. Judges and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) speak positively about the good practice in Bracknell Forest. Social workers receive good training and are credible, confident witnesses. Statements and care plans presented in court are of a very high quality and support robust, well-considered decisions, leading to timely legal permanence decisions for children and their families.
28. Permanence planning and stability for children looked after are good. Long-term plans for all children are considered by the second statutory review. Parallel planning for those children unable to live safely with their parents was progressed speedily in all cases seen by inspectors. Children live in safe, stable, good-quality placements that meet their needs. Where it is appropriate, they live with their brothers and sisters, extended family or carers who provide them with emotional warmth and stability. Good use is made of family group conferences and special guardians, enabling all children to live with family members where it is assessed as suitable for them to do so. The local authority is working proactively with external organisations to continue to improve the sufficiency of foster homes, in particular those available for adolescents.
29. Bespoke targeted work by the well-established multi-agency 'Life chances' team (LCT) has significantly contributed to improved placement stability. The

number of children who have had three or more placement moves is decreasing. In responding quickly and allocating tasks to the most appropriate worker or agency, the LCT is helping to support foster carers by increasing their emotional resilience and practical skills in caring for vulnerable adolescents. This is enabling children, particularly adolescents with complex needs, to remain in the same placement.

30. The work of the IROs is exceptional. They are highly effective in supporting all children looked after. They consistently participate in key meetings, ensuring independent oversight and bringing effective challenge to planning for children. IROs develop enduring relationships with children, regularly visiting them in their foster or residential homes, and carry out direct work. This provides additional independent safeguards and ensures that plans for children progress swiftly. The timeliness of children looked after reviews and the level of participation by children in their reviews (98%) are both very good. The minutes of review meetings are child centred and written directly to the child in plain language. As a result, children know why they are in care, how they can stay in touch with their family members and who is responsible for making sure that they remain safe.
31. All care plans are comprehensive and include contingency plans. Actions are updated regularly, agreed by managers, and shared with the child and also their parents, where appropriate. Children's health, education, cultural and diversity needs are sensitively considered, recorded and used to inform plans. There is clear evidence that children have carefully assessed supported contact with their parents, brothers and sisters and people who are important to them. The Children in Care Council (known as 'Say it loud, say it proud' (SiLSiP)) has designed, illustrated and produced a child-friendly book explaining contact. This is available to all children, their carers and professionals.
32. Children looked after are listened to well, and their voice influences strategic decisions and the development of services. The work of SiLSiP is outstanding. Children and young people play a pivotal role in developing and improving services, and holding senior leaders and elected members to account. SiLSiP successfully negotiated additional resources so that children in care have sufficient support to complete their life-story work. The 'Big ballot' annual event provides children with an opportunity to vote on issues that are important to them. In 2015, young people voted to address bullying. SiLSiP responded by creating a stop motion animation film, 'Just the same'. This was shown at the annual looked after children achievement awards in 2016 and also distributed to designated looked-after children teachers. When bullying is identified as a potential issue for children looked after, it is dealt with quickly.
33. Five members of SiLSiP are accredited trainers and have delivered 'Did you know?' workshops to over 42 professionals, helping them to understand what it is like to be in care. These events are highly regarded by participants, and inspectors considered that the workshop that they attended was outstanding.

The children with additional needs group, BOOM ('Because our opinion matters'), is working effectively with the participation officer to improve disability services.

34. Children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation or missing from care receive well-coordinated, bespoke services that are delivered sensitively by skilled, tenacious workers, helping to reduce risks. Effective multi-agency arrangements and work by the specialist team guarantee early information sharing and intelligence about risks to children, and leads to rapid action to protect them from harm. Robust tracking and mapping of children at risk and clear written analysis demonstrate that social workers understand the individual children and their specific vulnerabilities. The quality of return home interviews with 'missing' children is good. All children are offered an interview within 72 hours of returning home. The take-up is high, and very few young people decline to participate. When children are reluctant to engage, independent workers, who are allocated to specific children, are assiduous in keeping in touch with them, and are reducing the number of episodes of going missing effectively.
35. Cyber safety is prioritised in schools. The virtual school team ensures that all children looked after who have laptops for use at home receive a support session, together with their carers, to underline the importance of online safety. Direct work sessions with pupils in secondary schools and tailored sessions for those pupils with additional needs are raising the awareness of exploitation and the risks associated with social media.
36. The work of the virtual school is outstanding. The education of children who are looked after is a key priority for the council. There is strong strategic leadership and management oversight by the virtual school headteacher. As a result, outcomes for children are consistently good, and in some cases they surpass expectations. An example of this is that children at key stage 1 and key stage 2 perform better in phonics than other children of the same age in Bracknell Forest.
37. Innovative approaches, enabling children to reach their full potential, start from a very young age, and this work is followed throughout their school time and beyond. In Year 7 and Year 8, children in care are encouraged to start to build their emotional resilience and to broaden their thinking. Sensitive interventions by the virtual school team and effective partnership arrangements with a local careers company facilitate targeted activities, increasing self-confidence, knowledge of possible career choices and the options available to children. Tailor-made opportunities for work experience, volunteering, careers information, and advice and guidance sessions are offered from key stage 3 onwards to help children and young people to prepare for work, training and higher education. As a consequence of these creative approaches, outcomes for a growing number of children looked after are improving.

38. All personal education plans (PEPs) are completed within 20 days of children coming into care. The quality is excellent. PEPs consistently include the views of children and their carers, inform plans and lead to improved outcomes. The pupil premium grant is used well, successfully enhancing the educational outcomes of children in care, for example by the purchase of music lessons, therapeutic horse-riding sessions and one-to-one mathematics tuition, enabling children to pursue career options and develop their skills. Attendance at school is consistently high, currently at 96%, and this is closely monitored. No child looked after had been permanently excluded for a number of years, and low numbers receive fixed-term exclusions. At the time of the inspection, 81% of school-aged children who are looked after were attending good or better schools. Ten children looked after who are not in full-time mainstream education attend alternative provision. Each placement provider and each child's attainment child are monitored thoroughly by the virtual headteacher.
39. Effective processes in social care and work by the highly committed specialist nurse ensure that children looked after have 100% of health assessments and 93% of dental checks completed on time. When children require additional support for their emotional health, including those out of area, the local authority commissions expert services. At the time of the inspection, 10 children were in receipt of services from a counselling psychologist.
40. The fostering service is extremely well managed and staffed by conscientious and dedicated social workers. The quality of foster carer assessments and 'matching' reports is good. Foster carers who met with inspectors demonstrated considerable warmth and admirable aspirations for their children. For example, carers work closely with the virtual school so that they are helped to access good universities. Other carers develop a 'bucket list' for children and ensure that children achieve their hopes and dreams while in their care. All foster carers benefit from regular supervision which helps them to reflect on and improve the standard of care that they provide. Accessible specialist training is available, supporting carers to look after children with complex behavioural and emotional needs. Foster carers told inspectors that they feel valued and respected as professional members of the care team.

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| <p>The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is outstanding</p> |
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41. In Bracknell Forest, adoption is considered for all children at the earliest indication that they cannot live with their birth families. Excellent adoption practice has, at its roots, strong strategic vision and an understanding of children's need for permanence evident at every level of service provision. The local authority is absolutely dedicated to pursuing adoption for children, including those for whom it is considered harder to find adoptive placements.
42. The local authority is part of a regional dedicated adoption service across four of the six local authorities in Berkshire. Communication between the adoption

service and the local authority is necessarily robust, with effective tracking by senior managers of children with a plan of adoption. Firmly embedded early family-finding and forward-planning processes, supported by a system of early warnings sent to the adoption service, mean that children are promptly allocated a family finder when they first become looked after.

43. Proactive family finding, with close collaboration between the local authority and the adoption service, ensures that the right match is found. Family finders are ambitious for children, whom they come to know well, and there is a rigorous approach to matching children to their new parents, which ensures that the risk of disruption is minimised. As a consequence of effective family finding and the quality of post-adoption support, there have been no adoption disruptions in the two years preceding this inspection.
44. There is a sufficiency and diversity of potential adopters, and this promotes choice for Bracknell Forest children who need adoptive families. When suitable adopters are not identified through engagement with regional arrangements, other agencies and national processes are used in a timely way to identify families. During the inspection the inspectors saw a good example of this in a young child with complex needs who was matched within five months of making the placement order.
45. Adopters value highly the support received during the recruitment process from a regional social enterprise company funded by the Department for Education innovation fund. They spoke highly of the training and support through the peer mentoring and adopter-led training, and regarded a bespoke, evidenced-based, therapeutic parenting programme highly.
46. The quality of prospective adopters' reports (PARs) is excellent. They are clear, sufficiently informative and analytical, and support the matching process effectively. PARs also include a very helpful discussion on possible resolution and strategies to mitigate identified vulnerabilities. Adopters told inspectors that they found the assessment process to be transparent and appropriately challenging, and that adoption social workers were highly professional and knowledgeable. This ensures that prospective adopters are realistic about the rewards and challenges of becoming parents by adoption.
47. The adoption service actively promotes 'fostering for adoption' placements to reduce delay for children. Prospective adopters are encouraged to consider this option from the first enquiry and throughout the adoption process. There have been two 'fostering for adoption' placements, to date, for Bracknell Forest children, and a third is in process.
48. Bracknell Forest is committed to achieving adoption for children and there is no compromise on this, with a determination to secure adoption for all children for whom it is the best possible option. Close monitoring and review by senior managers are improving timeliness for most children.

49. A regional adoption advisory service administers the adoption panel, which serves all of the six local authorities across Berkshire. A well-chaired adoption panel meets twice a month, avoiding any delay and providing very effective scrutiny and challenge of the approval of adopters and matching recommendations. The panel chair spoke of Bracknell Forest's tenacity in seeking adoption for children as admirable and an example of good practice in ensuring that the most appropriate plan is achieved.
50. The agency decision maker is knowledgeable, passionate and knows children looked after well. She is conscientious in her role, challenges practice both internally and externally, scrutinises plans closely, and meets children and social workers before making her decisions.
51. Social workers know their children extremely well and, as a result, complete consistently good child permanence reports (CPRs). These provide comprehensive child and parental histories and a balanced analysis of the reason for adoption. They are a valuable record for the child in the future and are an effective tool for family finding and matching children to their new family.
52. Children who have a plan of adoption are prepared well for the move to their new families by both their foster carers and their social workers, and have access to therapeutic interventions, should they need it. Inspectors saw some very good direct work on children's life journeys and the provision of 'Life appreciation days' which ensure that children and their new families understand their story. However, while life-story work was undertaken in a timely way, there were some inconsistencies in how well the story of the child was conveyed in written format in life-journey books. An example of innovative practice was seen whereby the adopter is provided with the draft of a life-journey book to become familiar with how it is written and offer amendments, which helps them to be comfortable with the book as an active life-story tool for them and their child. (Recommendation)
53. Children and families receive excellent, easily accessible post-adoption support which minimises the risk of breakdown. Adopters confirmed that they are aware of the range of services that are available for therapeutic interventions.
54. Most notable is the service's exceptional added value brought by the skills of the post-adoption social worker. Trained in dyadic developmental psychotherapy, she uses these skills in her direct work with adopters and their children. The post-adoption social worker runs an under-fives group and a group for adopted children aged eight to 12 where they can share their experiences and talk openly about being adopted. She runs consultation sessions for adopters jointly with a psychologist and will be developing these forums for social workers. Post-adoption awareness raising is done in schools, where she works alongside behaviour support staff to develop education, health and care (EHC) plans.

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

55. Services for care leavers in Bracknell Forest are outstanding. Managers and personal advisers (PAs) work tenaciously and diligently to advocate on behalf of care leavers to ensure that they receive the best support to move safely towards independence. The small team of personal advisers is highly skilled and experienced. They are passionate about the young people whom they support and talk with pride about their work. Young people were equally enthusiastic about the team, and the help and support that they receive. One young person said: 'They will always offer to visit when they know that I am struggling. It makes me feel better and I don't feel like I am on my own.'
56. PAs ensure that they keep abreast of key issues affecting the young people whom they work with. They access relevant training and are very knowledgeable about the range of services and support available, whether locally or out of the area. Staff are ambitious for their young people and 'go the extra distance' to improve and enhance life chances for them. Strong relationships formed between staff and care leavers mean that all care leavers are in touch with the service.
57. Good partnership arrangements across many information services mean that care leavers can access help and support when they need it. A significant part of the work is to direct young people to the most relevant information and advice that they need as they navigate towards independence. Good arrangements are in place with Jobcentre Plus benefits advisers, and there are strong partnerships between specialist services, such as substance misuse and alcohol services, sexual health support and counselling services. Appropriate access to these services ensures that the large majority of young people have the help that they need to stay healthy, keep safe and become more financially astute.
58. Care leavers redesigned the health passport, which they are encouraged to complete, and all receive their health histories. For a number of care leavers, knowledge about long-standing health issues has helped them to manage their conditions and seek help more assertively. Each young person is encouraged to register with a local doctor, dentist and optician, as appropriate. The continued access to the looked-after children's specialist nurse is valued, and the co-location of the care leavers service (CLS) and the youth offending service, with access to the specialist nurse in this team, has improved health outcomes for many care leavers.
59. Care leavers with complex physical disabilities and mental health issues receive very good, targeted support to meet their accommodation, health and care requirements. Transition planning to adult services is highly effective. The collaborative partnership working ensures a seamless transition to adult services.

60. The quality of planning with young people is outstanding. Staff are appropriately supporting young people to stay safe and to reflect on and take responsibility for their actions. PAs are, as one young person said, 'not a soft touch' and young people know that they will be held to account, praised when they have done well and steered back on to track when they veer off course. Each pathway plan strongly reflects the voice of the young person, explains the complexity of the issues that they face and outlines sensitively the carefully explored next steps towards greater independence. Plans confirm regular engagement with strong and open relationships. They clearly and unequivocally expose a healthy level of challenge and discussion of the issues that the workers are debating with their young people, such as making sure that the rent is paid on time and job-seeking advice. In the large majority of cases, risk is assessed well to ensure that care leavers feel safe and stay safe. To underpin this effective practice, management oversight is robust, and decision making is scrutinised effectively and rigorously.
61. Care leavers receive excellent support from the virtual school's education, employment and training team (EET) to help them to find and sustain purposeful work or training. Five young people are currently at university and a further six will commence this year (approximately 20%). This demonstrates very good performance. Staff have organised visits to universities and delivered focused training to lecturers to ensure that care leavers receive their full entitlement and the appropriate funding. The EET team continues to provide ongoing support throughout their time away, which young people spoke of highly. The local further education college provides very good support to care leavers, which ensures that they keep on track. Currently, six care leavers at the college are successfully working to the same standard as other students. Two of them are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are studying English as an additional language.
62. The council provides a number of opportunities for care leavers to move into employment or training placements. Five training positions have recently been ring fenced by the council, yet there are still too few care leavers on council-sponsored apprenticeships or traineeships. Currently, only two care leavers are in apprenticeships.
63. Effective joint working with the CLS team makes sure that young people fully understand the implications of being in or out of work and the potential consequences for their current and future life experiences. Very few care leavers are not in education, employment or training. They include young parents and young people with highly complex health needs. Those young people who are able to work are engaging well with the EET team and are actively pursuing training programmes or job opportunities.
64. 'Staying put' arrangements with foster carers are used appropriately. Additional resources have been made available when it is clear that a young person's benefits will be adversely affected if they take on part-time work while continuing their education.

65. All care leavers live in suitable accommodation. They can readily access advice, support and guidance to help them to move towards managing their own tenancies. If care leavers obtain tenancies in Bracknell Forest, they are now exempt from paying council tax. The participation worker, himself an ex-care leaver/unaccompanied asylum seeker, was instrumental in lobbying for this change alongside the lead member.
66. The main accommodation provider in Bracknell Forest offers a range of supported housing, from 24/7 support to less intensive programmes to meet individual needs in preparing young people for independence. One smaller housing provider delivers a mandatory accredited programme of independent living skills training for young people. This has been highly successful and has led, in some instances, to care leavers securing their own tenancies. However, the choice of accommodation, such as supported lodgings, remains limited, and the service struggles to find more flexible provision which would offer greater and more affordable choice for care leavers.
67. Achievement and progress are celebrated regularly through a range of discrete activities and group work. Activities are generally informal and organised collectively by care leavers, the participation worker and PAs. A number of new initiatives to engage care leavers are well used, including a website, a Facebook page and WhatsApp applications. Care leavers are very aware of their rights and responsibilities. They are clear about how to complain. Care leavers have recently produced an attractive and accessible booklet explaining the range of services and support that care leavers can and should expect to receive.

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| Leadership, management and governance | Good |
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Children and families in Bracknell Forest benefit from good and outstanding services. The senior leadership team and elected members have a collective determination to provide high-quality services to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. Their unrelenting focus has ensured that progress has been sustained and services improved since the safeguarding and children looked after inspection in 2011.</p> <p>The local authority has a sound understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It fosters an open learning culture, engaging readily in internal and external reviews and challenge. Rigorous planning, access to good-quality training and a strong focus on innovation have led to an exceptionally stable workforce of proficient, experienced social workers that enables good social work practice. Senior leaders promote a strong ethos of participation and advocacy. They ensure that children's views are at the centre of their work and inform strategic planning.</p> <p>The majority of social workers have manageable caseloads, and this ensures that they have time to spend with children. As a result, children benefit from a wide range of creative direct work which enables them to understand their circumstances and improves their safety. The strategic and operational response to child sexual exploitation and children who go missing is robust and informed by a comprehensive analysis and problem profile, and a strong commitment to educating the local community to be able to identify signs of abuse. As a result, children receive well-coordinated services that reduce risk and harm.</p> <p>Partnership working is mainly strong, both at a strategic and an operational level. This is demonstrated by the introduction of the multi-agency safeguarding hub, which is delivering prompt and appropriate responses to referrals, and the established multi-agency 'Life chances' team. There are clear and effective governance arrangements across the strategic partnership. The children and young people's partnership board oversees the implementation of the children and young people's plan and prioritises the work needed to improve services for children. However, the absence of any review of progress limits the board's ability to demonstrate its effectiveness in improving outcomes for children.</p> <p>Corporate parenting arrangements are very strong, and elected members have high aspirations for children looked after and care leavers.</p> | |

Inspection findings

68. Senior leaders and elected members demonstrate commitment and ambition to improve outcomes for children and young people in Bracknell Forest. The local authority has an open, outward-looking approach, consistently searching for ways to improve services. Elected members and the senior leadership team know their services well and work purposefully together to drive improvement and implement the council's vision. Consequently, children and families now benefit from a range of good and outstanding services.
69. The director of children's services (DCS) and her senior leadership team have been successful in creating greater transparency and a culture of learning, support and challenge. Senior managers are connected to frontline practice and have a good knowledge of individual children. They provide consistent leadership, and are visible and accessible.
70. Links between senior leaders and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) are strong. The lead member for children is well informed and effective. He attends the children young people's partnership board and the LSCB, and provides regular briefings to elected members. He routinely visits frontline staff, as well as children, to ensure that he has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. The lead member has been influential in improving the quality of support for children and young people. For example, he made it his business to experience at first hand the financial challenges of care leavers, which led to a change in policy whereby care leavers are now exempt from council tax until they reach the age of 21.
71. Corporate parenting is exceptionally strong. The corporate parenting advisory panel campaigns for children looked after both actively and effectively. Members are committed corporate parents. They receive regular performance information and detailed reports, and this provides them with a clear and detailed understanding of the quality of services provided to children who are looked after in Bracknell Forest. There is purposeful engagement with children, both formally through the participation officer and informally through a range of activities. Three elected members act as mentors for children looked after. Elected members take on specific roles on behalf of the panel and report regularly on their progress. This enables them to challenge senior leaders and question activity effectively.
72. The Children, Young People and Learning Overview and scrutiny panel rigorously scrutinises the quality of services provided to children. Activity is extensive, and is led by elected members who have good insight and knowledge of their communities and the issues faced by children. Robust challenge is achieved through a wide range of relevant reports and enquiries. The committee has recently commissioned a comprehensive review of child sexual exploitation, and the majority of recommendations have been acted upon, leading to tangible improvements for children and young people.

73. A strong focus on performance management continuously drives improvement. The chief executive and lead member routinely review the directorate's performance through quarterly service reports. Managers use weekly performance information effectively in their service areas. The rigorous culture of performance management has led to sustained improvement in the timeliness of visits to children and of initial child protection conferences. Senior managers recognise that they have more work to do to move to a culture of measuring impact and outcomes, rather than processes, particularly in respect of the effectiveness of early help. A performance scorecard is in advanced development to further strengthen understanding of key performance indicators.
74. Quality assurance activity has driven up standards across the service. Historically, the emphasis has been on ensuring compliance with processes. A revised outcome audit tool now supports a focus on achieving better outcomes for children. Managers at all levels, including the DCS, chief executive and lead member, regularly audit children's case files to ensure the quality of practice and services. The head of performance management and governance ensures that there is robust follow-up on individual children's cases that have been judged less than good. She also plays a key role in making sure that audit findings are translated into improvements in practice and learning. Senior managers recognise that some audits are not always sufficiently self-critical, and that quarterly reports on audit activity are overly descriptive and lack robust analysis, both of which have the potential to dilute their effectiveness.
75. The DCS has been instrumental in driving the council-wide transformation plan. Strategic reviews of early help and education support services are in place. The newly implemented family safeguarding model informs a whole-system model of services to improve outcomes for children. Good partnership arrangements, a high-quality workforce, and a robust system of review and evaluation underpin the strategy.
76. The local authority has a range of commissioned and in-house services for children and young people. A well-developed joint strategic needs assessment and children looked after strategy informs strategic commissioning. Comprehensive quality assurance of these arrangements is in place, with regular performance reports and monitoring visits to ensure that services are effective. Parents are actively involved in the commissioning process, providing an extra layer of scrutiny. Plans are well advanced to involve children in the commissioning process.
77. The local authority is acutely aware that its workforce is one of its most valuable assets. The work of the children's social care programme board, combined with political support for additional financial resource and an ambitious and comprehensive workforce strategy, have been highly effective in securing a stable permanent workforce. Turnover, staff vacancies and the

use of agency social workers are low. This improves the consistency and quality of the service.

78. An effective caseload weighting system supports managers to ensure that caseloads are maintained at manageable levels. Where they are not, additional agency staff are recruited. Staff have access to a comprehensive package of multi-agency training and developmental opportunities, as well as a range of information, research and materials via web-based learning and resource sites. A well-structured pathway is in place for newly qualified social workers to access the assessed and supported year in employment. Future proofing of the workforce is also in place through the 'Step up to social work' scheme. Social workers enjoy working for Bracknell Forest. They appreciate the training and clinical supervision that they receive, as well as the availability and support of senior managers.
79. Management oversight is not yet consistently leading to improved outcomes for all children. In a very small minority of cases, management oversight has not been effective in driving children's plans, and drift and delay are evident. Independent reviewing officers provide the right level of robust critical challenge to ensure that plans are progressed, but child protection chairs are not as effective in providing the level of challenge that is needed. Senior managers have a direct line of sight on vulnerable children, including those who go missing or are at risk of sexual exploitation. Social workers have access to regular supervision and performance appraisals. (Recommendation)
80. The local strategic response to child sexual exploitation and children who go missing is informed by a comprehensive analysis and problem profile, and a strong commitment to educating the local community to identify the signs of abuse. The development of a specialist sexual exploitation and 'missing' social worker has ensured a more focused service for children. Well-attended and managed sexual exploitation and missing risk assessment conferences (SEMRAC) provide an effective response to children who go missing from home/care and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Comprehensive and timely return home interviews take place when children return after going missing. Information derived from interviews informs the analysis of patterns and trends effectively, and has led to targeted work to disrupt known localities of concern.
81. The joint strategic children and young people's plan, 'Creating opportunities' (2015–17), sets out the key priorities for children, and is overseen by the children and young people's partnership board. Priorities are sufficiently aligned with the joint strategic needs assessment and the Health and Wellbeing strategy. Despite well-attended meetings of the children and young people's partnership board, the board has not conducted an annual review of progress. This limits the board's ability to understand what impact it is having in terms of improving outcomes for children.

82. The local authority has strengthened the complaints process and is proactive in seeking to resolve complaints at an early stage. Consequently, complaints about children's services have decreased from a high number, 67, in 2015–16 to 41 in the past year. A thorough analysis of complaints and compliments informs the quality assurance process effectively. Few complaints are received from children. The local authority recognises this and has taken action to promote actively the complaints procedures to children through bespoke leaflets and direct access via a dedicated complaints phone number.
83. The work of the multi-agency 'Life chances' team has contributed effectively to improving short-term placement stability, and there has been a reduction in children looked after who have had three or more moves in a year. However, long-term placement stability, particularly for older children, remains a challenge. The local authority has taken action to respond to this by commissioning a provider to recruit carers. In addition, it has implemented a peer mentor respite service for all foster carers and a bespoke training programme that uses restorative parenting. However, it is too early to see any impact.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

Executive summary

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in Bracknell Forest is good. A highly motivated, committed group of partners is well led by a respected, influential chair who sets high expectations and provides effective challenge to improve services. The consistent board membership from a good range of agencies has enabled it to become a strong and critical friend to partners. Well-established links to other boards and partnerships, and engagement with senior leaders, ensure sufficient oversight of safeguarding arrangements. The board extends its reach through an effective, twice-yearly partnership forum which enables information sharing and learning for a wider audience of board members.

The mix of pan-Berkshire and local sub-groups is effective in maintaining sufficient scrutiny of local safeguarding arrangements while allowing collaboration, information sharing and pooling of resources across Berkshire. Findings from a wide range of audits, regular reports and a thorough section 11 process ensure that the board retains sufficient oversight and challenge to local safeguarding practice. Most audits are of good quality, contain feedback from children, families and professionals, and result in action plans to improve services. Section 11 work is particularly strong, and the involvement of general practitioners and the process to strengthen school improvements are most notable.

Several priority areas in the business plan are carried over from past years, reflecting a thorough approach by the board to assuring itself that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The current business plan reflects local needs and priorities, and has been directly influenced by children's views to ensure that children are protected from online safety risks. Broadening the engagement with children, community and faith groups is an emerging strength of the board.

The board is not fully meeting its statutory responsibility by monitoring the effectiveness of training. Although recognising that this area of board activity requires increased focus, it has not yet completed a full training needs analysis and is not fully aware of the provision, take-up or quality of single-agency training.

The performance dataset does not include information from all partners to provide a better focus on business priorities and outcomes.

Recommendations

84. Ensure that a full training needs analysis is completed, and that information regarding the availability, attendance and quality of single-agency training is developed.
85. Review and strengthen the performance dataset in order for it to assist the board to measure outcomes against its business priorities.

Inspection findings – the Local Safeguarding Children Board

86. A well-respected, committed independent chair leads a consistent and motivated board that acts as a strong and critical friend to partners. The board has well-established links with other strategic boards and partnerships, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, the children and young people's partnership and the community safety partnership, to ensure that priorities are aligned. Quarterly safeguarding monitoring meetings between senior leaders, such as the director of children's services, chief executive, lead member and the Independnet LSCB Chair, ensure that safeguarding arrangements and practice are kept high on the agenda.
87. The board is well represented by senior leaders in partner agencies. Attendance by board members at meetings is high, including two lay members with contrasting backgrounds and experience. The lead member for children's services sits as a participating observer, and this strengthens political oversight.
88. The board structure is regularly reviewed to ensure that it works effectively and efficiently for Bracknell Forest. Four pan-Berkshire sub-groups provide opportunities for collaboration, information sharing and pooled resources, while a further five Bracknell Forest sub-groups ensure that local needs are given sufficient focus. It is a strength of the board that, to fully assure itself of local safeguarding arrangements and practice, it has retained its own child sexual exploitation and section 11 sub-groups while also participating in the pan-Berkshire arrangements.
89. Section 11 work carried out by the board is strong. Bracknell Forest has a sub-group to audit section 11 returns for local organisations. Panel meetings are robust, and evidence regular and thorough auditing of children's social care commissioned services, schools and early years providers. The section 11 process to support school improvement has been further strengthened by follow-up visits carried out by the lead education safeguarding officer and a consultant. These visits include interviews with children, parents and staff to look at strengths, the areas requiring further work and the development of action plans. All general practitioners (GPs) in Bracknell Forest have completed section 11 audits. They are involved in local learning events to consider safeguarding matters and share information. The resulting increased

awareness has brought additional benefits, such as more GPs completing reports for child protection case conferences.

90. The LSCB business plan is made up of core functions and targeted priorities to ensure that it meets its statutory responsibilities while also responding to changing local needs. Several priority areas in the business plan are carried over from previous years, reflecting a thorough approach by the board in assuring itself that safeguarding arrangements are working well. Child sexual exploitation, for example, has been a priority in the past two years, and now remains as a core function due to well-embedded arrangements, such as sexual exploitation and missing risk assessment conferences, improved rates of return home interviews and examples of disruption activity.
91. The LSCB has a good understanding of children missing and children at risk of sexual exploitation. The Pan-Berkshire sub-group has been instrumental in developing a coordinated response across Berkshire, for example by implementing the sexual exploitation screening tool. Joint working across Berkshire has also resulted in the requirement for taxi drivers to undertake safeguarding training in order to obtain a licence. This training has to be refreshed every three years, otherwise the licence is revoked. Work with local hotels to raise awareness has resulted in examples of disruption activity. For example, a hotel called the police when the staff were concerned about a young person who turned out to be a missing girl from a neighbouring authority.
92. The board receives an array of audits, reports, presentations and performance data to monitor and evaluate frontline practice and inform its priorities. Recent audits include those on domestic abuse, thresholds and the quality of case conference reports. Most audits are of good quality and result in action plans that are monitored by an audit tracker that shows outcomes and impact. Audits identify service strengths and areas for improvement, and contain the views of children, families and professionals. Learning from audits is disseminated to partners through notifications that include key messages, the views of children and families, and recommendations for improved practice.
93. A number of audits, reports and presentations have assisted the board to monitor the effectiveness of early help. These have included an audit on thresholds, which reported positive findings on the step up/step down process, and an audit considering the early help services that are available to support primary schoolchildren who have been excluded from school. In addition, the board receives annual reports on oversight by the early intervention hub and the common assessment framework (CAF). The dataset complements this information, for example with the numbers of step up/down arrangements. It also identifies emerging trends, such as higher numbers of children from secondary schools being referred.
94. Although the dataset provides some useful data, it does not include information from all partners. This would provide the board with a clearer

view of the difference that agencies are making and give further weight to the board when holding partners to account. For example, the dataset is weighted towards children's social care yet lacks some essential information, such as the frequency of social work visits to the children on plans. The board could also strengthen its monitoring of the effectiveness of early help if it regularly had a breakdown of agencies completing CAFs. Moreover, the dataset does not indicate the number of staff who do not undertake multi-agency training. A more explicit link between the dataset and business priorities would assist the board to show how progress is being achieved. (Recommendation)

95. A 'risks and challenges' log highlights the determination of the board to improve safeguarding services for children. Examples include a challenge to children's social care regarding the number of missing children who have been screened for sexual exploitation. This led to a review of these children and provided a benchmark for further audits. The log also records repeated concern about the loss of a therapeutic service for children who have experienced domestic abuse. This resulted in the LSCB instigating an audit regarding domestic abuse and support services and, due to this continued challenge, additional services are now in place.
96. A thorough quality assurance learning and improvement framework sets out how the board will identify and embed learning from a range of sources such as audits, performance data, serious case reviews (SCRs) and feedback from children, families and practitioners. The most recent SCR (C) was published in 2016 but relates to a case in 2013. All action plans have now been completed. The LSCB requested follow-up reports from six agencies after 12 months to show what differences had been made to practice. Learning from this SCR was disseminated prior to publication and, most significantly, resulted in a multi-agency protocol regarding bruising/suspicious marks on non-independently mobile babies and children. An audit of cases in 2015 showed the positive impact of this protocol, with cases referred by the Royal Berkshire Hospital and appropriately followed up by other agencies.
97. Most social workers spoken with during the inspection had some knowledge of the LSCB and the most recent SCR. Findings from SCRs, both locally and nationally, are incorporated into safeguarding training, and information on SCRs and audit findings are disseminated to staff through LSCB notifications. In addition, a comprehensive LSCB website provides information on safeguarding for professionals, parents, carers and young people, and links to other sites and publications, including training, threshold documents, the LSCB report and the business plan. The communication and community engagement sub-group is developing further ways to disseminate information. This has already led to the production of an animated version of the threshold document, and a 'Take5' campaign is being developed to provide the key safeguarding messages in just five minutes.
98. Following an evaluation of the previous Pan Berkshire arrangements for training in June 2016, the LSCB established a local Training and Professional

Development Sub Group to meet the specific training needs of Bracknell Forest staff. Although the LSCB training website evidences a range of multi-agency safeguarding training, learning and improvement workshops, and links to relevant publications, the LSCB is not fully monitoring the effectiveness of training. It does not have a comprehensive training needs analysis for all partners and is not able to identify the availability, quality or numbers attending single-agency training. In recognition that more needs to be done, the LSCB has introduced a charging policy for training and is using the funds to secure a consultant to develop the training needs analysis and further strengthen the process to evaluate training courses. (Recommendation)

99. The LSCB extends its reach to partners effectively through a twice-yearly partnership forum. The forum is made up of a wide range of board members, including from the voluntary and community sectors, who come together to consider reports, audit findings and presentations. This is highly valued by partners, who see it as an effective means of networking, sharing information and learning. Members report that it is a concrete way to test awareness, such as learning from SCRs, and whether agencies are undertaking training.
100. Work to engage further with children and families, faith, voluntary and community groups is an emerging strength. The communication and community engagement sub-group, led by one of the lay members, has planned an event this summer for children from 10 local secondary schools to discuss safeguarding issues and concerns. Children's concerns regarding online safety and the fragmented response have directly influenced the board to set it as one of its priorities for this year.
101. The Pan-Berkshire policies and procedures sub-group ensures that policies and procedures remain up to date and are effective. The threshold document was refreshed in 2016 and clearly sets out the core principles, levels and indicators of need, and the services available. A threshold audit in 2016 tested the effectiveness and understanding of thresholds by considering 13 case files of children receiving early help or children's social care. This was followed up with feedback from the children and their families. Staff attended workshops on the findings and shared their own views on multi-agency working. The audit concluded that there was effective multi-agency working at all levels.
102. The LSCB annual report 2015–16 provides a detailed overview of the work of the board, learning from audits and reports, progress against the business plan and how these have shaped future priorities. Although the report demonstrates the board's scrutiny in a wide range of service areas, it is not always clear whether the work described has made a difference to services or what still needs to be done. The board has recognised that it needs to do more to show the impact of its work across services and has taken steps to address this.

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 seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

The inspection team

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