

Leeds City 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: 20 January 2015 – 11 February 2015

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The overall judgement is that children’s services are good

The local authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for good.

It is Ofsted’s expectation that, as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection.²

The judgements on areas of the service that contribute to overall effectiveness are:

1. Children who need help and protection	Good
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	Outstanding

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 Inspection 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.

² A full description of what the inspection judgements mean can be found at the end of this report.

Contents

The local authority	3
Summary of findings	3
What does the local authority need to improve?	4
Areas for improvement	4
The local authority's strengths	5
Progress since the last inspection	7
Summary for children and young people	10
Information about this local authority area	11
Inspection judgements about the local authority	13
The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)	49
Summary of findings	49
What does the LSCB need to improve?	50
Areas for improvement	50
Inspection judgement about the LSCB	50
What the inspection judgements mean	56
The local authority	56
The LSCB	56
Information about this inspection	57

The local authority

Summary of findings

Children's services in Leeds are good because:

Leadership and management

- Children's services in Leeds benefit from outstanding, inspirational and confident operational and political leadership. The 'Child Friendly' Leeds ambition has cross-party political support, reflected in ongoing investment in Children's Services despite the challenging financial context.
- The local authority has taken a thoughtful and methodical approach to improvement and has followed the child's journey. Firm foundations underpin the effectiveness of services. Leeds has placed a considerable emphasis on creating an environment where good quality social work can flourish. Further work is now needed to ensure consistency and quality in practice across the city.

Quality of practice

- There have been significant improvements in every part of the local authority's arrangements for safeguarding children and young people. Risk and harm are responded to in a timely, assured and well-coordinated way. There are extensive early and targeted help services available to families at the first emergence of a problem, delivered by knowledgeable, confident and well-trained practitioners.
- Assessments are informed by direct work with children, young people and their families, with good analysis of their circumstances. The authority and professionals across the city put children and young people at the heart of their work, and children are seen and spoken to as appropriate.
- There is a robust and well-coordinated response to children who are missing and/or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation.
- Decisions made to look after children and young people are appropriate. Robust assessments and innovative support methods with strong management oversight ensure that delay is avoided if children's circumstances do not improve. Children and young people live in safe, stable and appropriate homes and have sustained relationships with social workers and carers who know them well.
- Adoption as a permanency option is considered early for children where care proceedings are being initiated. The local authority has substantially reduced the number of children waiting to be adopted, with 112 children adopted in the last year.
- Services for care leavers are good. Strong multi-agency partnerships have improved outcomes in education, employment and training. Care leavers have access to a wide range of suitable and supported accommodation and are well supported by tenacious staff.

What does the local authority need to improve?

There are no priority or immediate actions.

Areas for improvement

Leadership, Management and Governance

1. Extend the reach of the outcomes-based accountability approach, so that outcomes are clearly identified in all children's written plans to improve children's and families' lives and inform service development.
2. Ensure that all frontline managers and staff fully understand the capability of the electronic recording system, in order that they can produce reports that help them to effectively understand their performance and further drive improvements in the quality of services offered to children and their families.
3. Further embed the culture of continuous professional development by ensuring that managers agree challenging learning goals with social workers as part of the appraisal cycle, and reinforce this through regular, reflective supervision.

Help and protection

4. Ensure that assessments, plans and formal meetings consistently give attention to the individual characteristics of children and their families, for example, ethnicity, culture, faith, gender.
5. Improve agency attendance at all initial child protection meetings to improve the identification of risk, and plans to ensure children's safety; in particular, that of police, general practitioners and mainstream midwifery services.
6. Improve access and waiting times for CAMHS for children in need of help and protection.

Looked After children

7. Ensure that findings from return home interviews are collated and analysed at a strategic level in order to understand the reasons why young people go missing, and any emerging trends and themes that can inform future service planning.
8. Ensure that all foster carers have access to training in child sexual exploitation.
9. Ensure that schools are held to account for their use of the pupil premium in optimising the attainment of children looked after.

10. Improve the current care planning format to make it easier to understand the long-term goals for children and young people, and enhance their ability to understand what is happening to them.
11. Improve Personal Education Plans, ensuring that they contain SMART targets which can be used to drive sustained improvement in pupils' performance.

Adoption

12. Ensure that all post-adoption support plans are measurable and outcome based.
13. Ensure that 'later in life' letters are personal, and that the language used is easily understood.

Care leavers

14. Improve Pathway Plans so that they contain the detail needed regarding specific targets and outcomes for young people.
15. Ensure that all young people have information in relation to their health history and about their entitlements.

The local authority's strengths

16. Children and young people are at the heart of the city's 'growth strategy'. This is articulated in the council's ambition to be recognised as one of the world's first Child Friendly Cities. Safeguarding children and young people is a key priority within this strategy and the Leeds approach is underpinned by strong governance arrangements and committed city-wide partnerships.
17. 'Three obsessions' have become the main focus for improvement across the local authority and the partnership, all of which are evidencing improved outcomes for children and young people. The three 'obsessions' are to safely reduce the number of children and young people becoming looked after, to improve young people's life chances through better attendance at school, and to improve the provision of education, employment and training opportunities for all young people.
18. Leeds' have successfully integrated local authority, health and third sector services which have evolved into a new early help service, underpinned by the 'Best Start' strategy. Multi-agency, locality 'cluster' arrangements ensure that good and effective use is made of local partnerships – particularly children's centres and learning settings.

19. A unique investment and commitment to 'Restorative Practices' is having a transformational impact on culture and professional practice across both the social work service and the Children's Partnership. This places children, young people and their families at the heart of the decisions which affect them. It is based on the theory that positive outcomes are more likely to be achieved when those in authority do things with children and families, rather than to them or for them. It is successfully challenging traditional social work approaches and is supporting families' own capacity to respond to identified concerns themselves. During the inspection, the authority secured government innovation funding to expand its restorative approach, predicated on the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) model.
20. The 'front door' has been transformed into a strong and robust set of safeguarding arrangements underpinned by a comprehensive use of research and intelligence-led 'action learning'. A large-scale restructuring of social work services into a locality model, based around 25 multi-agency clusters, is steadily improving the recruitment, retention and professional development of good quality social work staff. A clear career structure and a comprehensive workforce development programme have reduced dependency on agency and temporary staff and raised the status of social work across the city.
21. The local authority's commitment to becoming a learning organisation has been helped by a service and partnership-wide commitment to the use of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA). Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) has developed from an early pilot to three area teams covering the city. In 2013, Leeds established two additional MST teams, one focusing on child abuse and neglect and the other offering services to young people leaving care or custody.
22. Leeds has a successful Families First programme. It draws on a restorative approach and strong multi-agency partnerships, to create a single plan for a family with a clearly-allocated lead practitioner. Inspectors have seen evidence of a positive impact on school attendance, crime reduction and employment.
23. Each of the three districts also benefit from a Family Intervention Service (FIS), which provides intensive, time-limited support for families with a number of additional needs. This includes where there is violence in the family, parental mental health issues, parental substance misuse, and/or children's poor school attendance. Practitioners are offering a range of practical support to parents and families, including access to parenting classes, individual work to address specific needs and vulnerabilities and help with establishing effective routines in the home, for example at bedtimes or to get children ready for school. Parents who spoke to inspectors feel that this help is effective and has made a difference to their lives.

24. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) holds the Restorative Justice Service Quality Mark and has recently won two national awards for its innovative work with girls and young women. A pioneering programme works with adolescent perpetrators of domestic violence. The YOS hosts the resettlement consortium in South and West Yorkshire, a key part of the Government's Transforming Youth Custody programme.

Progress since the last inspection

25. In July 2009, the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements found that Leeds Children's Services did not adequately safeguard children. In January 2010, inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's services found safeguarding inadequate. Services to children looked after were adequate. In March 2010, a Government Improvement Notice was placed on Leeds and an Improvement Board was established. A wholesale service restructure began. A new Senior Leadership Team was appointed and a clear strategic vision for children's services in the city was developed: Child Friendly Leeds.
26. The Child and Family Assessment was launched in 2012, which coincided with the introduction of a new electronic information system. A dedicated voice and influence team was created to work alongside the social work service, which has strengthened the voices of children, young people and their families in decisions which affect them. In the autumn of 2011, the implementation of Early Start Teams began integrating children's centre and health practitioners.
27. The Department for Education (DfE) lifted the Improvement Notice in December 2011 and the Improvement Board was dissolved. The Chair's final letter to the Under Secretary of State said that Leeds has placed Children's Services 'right at the top of its priorities'. Since then, the development of a clear and ambitious vision has fostered a relentless focus on continuous improvement.
28. An outcomes based accountability (OBA) approach to monitoring the impact of services for children and families has been implemented. Together with the considerable strengthening of management practice, this is creating a culture of high support and high challenge across the service. The local authority has firmly embedded a culture of learning and improvement in strategic planning and operational thinking.
29. A refreshed workforce strategy strongly focuses on continual professional development, and has established clear career pathways for social workers and increased capacity. This has resulted in improved workforce stability and strengthened relationships between social workers, children and their families.

30. A clear and comprehensive performance management and quality assurance framework, 'Journey to Better Outcomes', is now in place. Partners across the city demonstrate an increasing understanding of the issues affecting specific families and communities, and their responsibilities to contribute to improving outcomes for children and young people.
31. A dedicated Looked After Children's Service has been created, bringing together children looked after, care leavers, fostering and adoption services under one head of service. The single pathway planning team was replaced by six specialist teams for looked after children age 13 and above. This increased the capacity of the service, but also brought social workers and personal advisors together which has given additional priority to the needs of looked after children. Since then, three additional teams have been created to reduce caseloads and improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Services to foster carers have been significantly enhanced, and there has been considerable investment in services for care leavers.
32. The return of services for schools into the local authority from Education Leeds three years ago provided opportunities to reconfigure and develop services to raise aspirations of looked after children and care leavers, and to ensure better outcomes for them. This included the creation of a dedicated looked after children's service and a head teacher of a virtual school to ensure a tight focus on driving improvements in services for looked after children. Actions taken, together with the development of partnerships with school leaders and targeted services, are making their mark, as can be seen in the improvements in attendance and achievements of primary school pupils. There has also been an improvement in GCSE results and in the number of care leavers moving on successfully into education, training or employment.
33. In March 2013 a city-wide Family Group Conferencing (FGC) service was launched. In February 2014, the local authority budget confirmed continuing investment in early intervention through an ongoing commitment to keep all children's centres open and to invest in FGC. The Duty and Advice Team has been further enhanced to bring a new approach to contact and referral, encouraging 'conversations' between qualified and experienced practitioners and callers who have concerns about a child. This approach focuses on discussions to determine the best course of action, and explores appropriate prevention and support if a social work service is not required.

34. Considerable progress has been made over the past two years in tackling child sexual exploitation (CSE). Practitioner awareness training has been rolled out across the partnership. A CSE risk and identification tool, together with a vulnerability risk management plan, supports social workers to analyse a child's vulnerability and risk of sexual exploitation. In 2013 a Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Coordinator was appointed, based within the Integrated Safeguarding Unit. A CSE project worker was also appointed to work extensively with looked after children and care leavers, providing a clear focus, together with advocacy, access and assertive outreach. This is providing clear support pathways for children and young people identified as being at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation.

Summary for children and young people

- When children and young people need help to be safe, there is lots of support available. Social workers, teachers, police, health workers and staff in children's centres now work together in groups across the city called 'Clusters'. This means that families now get help very quickly and that small problems can usually be sorted out before they become big problems.
- People working with children say that when they are worried about a child or young person, they can telephone people in the City Council who listen carefully and give them good advice. They say that staff take the right action quickly when there is a risk of a child being unsafe.
- Senior leaders and councillors have a passion to get things right for all children. This is making a positive difference to young people's safety, to their lives at home and to their achievements in school, especially primary schools. Children and young people are spending more days in school, with attendance improving every year.
- Children and young people benefit from social workers who know them well, are committed and skilled and who do not give up on them.
- Children and young people who live with foster carers or live in children's homes are looked after well. If young people want to stay with their foster carers when they reach 18, they are helped to do so if this is what they and their carers want.
- When children need to be adopted this happens quickly. Children are adopted with their brothers and sisters wherever this is possible.
- Social workers and personal advisers for care leavers develop good relationships with children and young people; they listen well and get the right help quickly, but they do not always make it clear in children's and young people's care plans what they are doing to help or how long it will take. Inspectors have asked the council to make sure that they do this better.
- At important meetings about children and their families, social workers always attend, but sometimes the words they use do not help children and their parents to understand what is happening or what they need to do.
- Care leavers are helped to stay where they live until they are ready to move on, and they get good support when they set up home or go to university. Personal advisers help prepare young people to live independently, and help them to plan their education or training or to gain work. Care leavers do not all know what help they can get and do not always have the information they need about their health histories.

Information about this local authority area

Children living in this area

- Approximately 158,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Leeds City. This is 21% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 22% of the local authority's children are living in poverty
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 20% (the national average is 17%)
 - in secondary schools is 17% (the national average is 15%)
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 23% of all children living in the area, compared with 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Pakistani and Black African.
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language :
 - in primary schools is 18% (the national average is 19%).
 - in secondary schools is 13% (the national average is 14%).
- Leeds is a vibrant, diverse and growing city, it covers a mix of large urban and rural areas with the inner city areas typified by a more dense and diverse, and faster-growing population. Leeds has a greater-than-national proportion of areas in the lowest 3, 10 and 20% most deprived areas in the country. Mid-year 2013 Leeds population was approximately 764,000. The overall population has increased by 5.1 per cent since the 2001 Census. The annual number of births in Leeds has increased by a third; from 7,500 in 2000/01 to 10,000 or more for each of the last five years. The make-up of the child population is changing with increases in those eligible for free school meals; those with English as an additional language; and those of black and minority ethnic heritage. There has been an increase in the number of residents that were born overseas.

Child protection in this area

- At the end of December 2014, 5,610 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 6,974 at the end of March 2014.
- At the end of December 2014, 642 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan. This is a reduction from 983 at the end of March 2013.
- At end of November 2014, 31 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is an increase from 17 at end of March 2014.

Children looked after in this area

- At 20th January 2015, 1,294 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 82 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 1,340 at the end of March 2014. Of this number:
 - 293 (or 22%) live outside the local authority area
 - 74 live in residential children’s homes, of whom 42% live out of the authority area
 - 4 live in residential special schools³, all of whom live out of the authority area
 - 992 live with foster families, 50% of whom are with extended family members; 23% live out of the authority area
 - 107 live with parents, of whom 10% live out of the authority area
 - 14 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 112 adoptions
 - 51 children became subjects of special guardianship orders
 - 440 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 4.1% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 42 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living between April 2014 up to the end of December 2014. 32 young people are in semi-independent living.
 - no children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Other Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates 10 children’s homes. Six were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection and four adequate. Other information about this area
- The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since September 2010.
- The Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board has been in post since July 2010.

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for fewer than 295 days.

Inspection judgements about the local authority

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>The local authority and key partner agencies have, in recent years, reviewed and improved every part of the arrangements for safeguarding children and promoting their well-being. The strategies, structures and approaches to working with families have resulted in service responses that deliver the widest range of support while strengthening the focus on the protection needs of all children.</p> <p>Considerable, sustained investment ensures active and well-coordinated help at a local level from the earliest point of need. A well-considered, family-centred approach is supporting many families and engaging family and social networks in achieving safe solutions for children. There is clear evidence of a robust, assertive approach where children are not able to receive sufficient or safe parenting even within the wider family.</p> <p>Children and their families are increasingly being offered a wide range of services. When need becomes more complex, or concerns for the protection of children arise, there is a clear arrangement for direct contact with an experienced social worker or manager. Thresholds of concern are generally well understood, with direct access and ‘professional conversations’ readily available to explore any worries for a child. The extent of adult domestic violence, mental health issues and substance misuse is also well understood, and met when necessary with well co-ordinated and extensive range of services.</p> <p>Risk and harm are responded to in a timely, assured and well-coordinated way. There is a robust and well-coordinated response to children who are missing and/or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation. This is informed by an effective sharing of information and intelligence between all key agencies. When concerns reduce, support is effective in sustaining the changes made.</p> <p>Children are at the heart of child protection enquiries as well as all assessments and plans. They are seen and spoken to or observed where appropriate. There is a developing advocacy service and a revised toolkit for gaining their wishes and feelings. Protection and other plans identify risks and concerns well. When change does not take place, decisive action is then taken to ensure a safe upbringing for children.</p>	

35. Children and young people are at the heart of the work of professionals across the city. Social workers are persistent in seeking to engage children. They know the children well, seeing them alone where appropriate, and assessing their experiences within their family. A well-coordinated locality and cluster approach results in early identification and extensive work with families according to need.
36. Thresholds for early and targeted help are appropriate. The approach adopted and agreed across agencies within the area, and well supported by the LSCB, provides open access for all to discuss concerns, and especially for agencies to engage in a 'professional conversation' to explore their worries. This has led to a marked increase in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), with 500 additional assessments in 2013-14. This represented a 32% increase on the 2012-13 performance. Early help assessments and plans are mostly clear and continue to improve, with families being engaged well throughout. It is acknowledged that further improvement is needed in the quality of assessments, in particular in relation to the need for clearer timescales within plans.
37. Substantial investment in an extensive network of early and targeted help, along with coordination at a very local level, is a cornerstone of the public service approach across the area. Adopting a restorative approach, extensive and effective use is made of family group conferencing (FGC), multi-systemic therapy (MST) and family intervention services (FIS) to achieve early support, early change and early improvement. These services are well-established and delivered by confident, knowledgeable, well-trained and supported practitioners. Parents who spoke to inspectors feel that this help is effective and has made a difference to their lives.
38. Between April and December 2014, 567 Family Group Conferences were held for families; 319 where children were aged five or under, including unborn babies, and 248 for children and young people between the ages of 6 and 17. In this period, 249 children were safely and appropriately supported to remain within their families. There is clear evidence of continuous strengthening of partnerships between schools, police, health and the voluntary sector, supported by the children's social work service. The targeted services are aligned, along with locality social work teams and early help 'clusters' (25) and children's centres (56), with considerable individual and shared commitment to providing help and support. Variation in the performance of localities and clusters, inevitable in areas with different rates of social mobility, is understood and closely monitored by senior managers.
39. Schools' commitment is highly active, evidenced by the use of 'top-sliced' funding from their designated schools grant. The police also provide active support at the locality level through 23 safer schools officers based on-site across a range of secondary schools and specifically named community support officers across all primary schools.

40. Children with a disability receive an appropriate response from the three integrated Children's Health and Disability (CHAD) specialist teams. Assessments benefit from the involvement of experienced workers. When there are dual issues of child protection and complex disabilities, while risk is appropriately identified, social workers are less able to demonstrate evidence-based practice informing assessments and plans. The needs of the disabled child are not, however, allowed to mask safeguarding and child protection concerns. Integrated working means that there is a shared understanding of the individual child, enabling all agencies to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities and to help distinguish between disability and child protection issues. Transfer to continuing care with adult care services is managed through a dedicated, social work-led Transitions team. Leeds successfully implemented the SEND reforms by September 2014, and the DfE gave Leeds a green rating for its local offer.
41. The early help assessments and interventions seen were of sufficient quality, generally effective and leading to positive improvements. The local authority 'obsession' with school attendance has, for example, improved performance from 88.6% to 94.6% in the last year. There has also been an 11% reduction in children entering the care system overall, with the number of under-fives becoming looked after reducing by one quarter.
42. The approach to inter-agency and service thresholds is distinctive in the area, with all agencies welcoming the offer by Children's Social Work Services (CSWS) to engage in 'professional conversation' with any agency that is concerned about a child. Experienced social work practitioners and managers provide this capacity. This openness and assured professional response supports their current work and next steps with other early or targeted help services. It enhances the confidence of these agencies in working with families, significantly reducing any barriers between professional boundaries. Families also welcome the often seamless provision of services as levels of need change.
43. For those children whose needs are greater, or risks require action, CSWS responds in a timely way, particularly to those immediately or most at risk of harm. The social worker practitioner base has become considerably more stable and able over the last two years. All social workers undertaking child protection work are suitably qualified and experienced. Management oversight is robust and well recorded.
44. CSWS works effectively with the police in establishing strategy discussions and child protection enquiries. Thresholds applied to child protection enquiries are mostly appropriate, though a small number of enquiries are undertaken when there is not, or not yet, sufficient reason.

45. Out of hours there is a robust response, often resulting in high quality assessments. Information sharing with the out-of-hours service is good; however, this is based on electronic communication, despite the team being co-located with the Duty and Advice Team. This is a missed opportunity for direct face-to-face discussion and handover.
46. The age profile of those subject to child protection enquiries and plans is in line with the robust focus on early help and protection. The younger the child is, the greater the likelihood of a child protection plan following enquiries, with those unborn or under one year accounting for 12.4% (98) of enquiries, with 47% resulting in a plan. For those under school age, the overall proportions are also high, with 319 subject to enquiries (40.5% of the total) and 47% (150) becoming subject to plans. There is clear evidence of a growing understanding and focus on identifying and responding to poor parenting at the earliest opportunity.
47. Key to the joint working is the extensive and progressive development of information, analysis and intelligence sharing between agencies. The police and CSWS are at the heart of this approach, with additional resources and an extensive range of agencies involved. There is a clear understanding of the need to work alongside parents, involving matters of consent from the outset where appropriate. However not all multi-agency professionals understand the issue of consent and more work needs to be done to ensure consistency of approach across the partnership.
48. There is a good and improving focus on domestic violence (DV). The high profile that domestic violence has been given across the partnership has led to an understandable increase in domestic violence notifications and enquiries, and the success of the interventions has resulted in a reducing rate of repeat episodes. Domestic violence still constitutes 28.8% of all referrals to CSWS, but re-referrals to CSWS continue to fall (from 35.8% in 2012), and at 22.5% they are below the national average.
49. There are also active responses to others with an urgent need. Those over 16 years old and vulnerable to homelessness benefit from rapid inter-agency assessments and coordinated actions, particularly with the dedicated officer within the housing authority. The local authority does not use bed and breakfast for these vulnerable young people, and has not done so for some years. There is also additional accommodation being developed, providing carer-based accommodation for those young people in crisis, aimed at preventing overnight detention in police cells, remands to local authority accommodation and other urgent responses to meet immediate need. While these are not large in number, the provision of up to six beds is a welcome addition to capacity.

50. Decision making is rapid, with a way forward being established within the working day. Managers within the Duty and Advice Team, or the receiving locality or CHAD team, clearly determine the actions to be taken. Consistency and continuity is a particular strength, with the same allocated social worker continuing to work with the child and family from the identification of need through to risk reduction or an alternative plan for permanence. The commitment to a restorative approach is welcomed by most parents and agencies, building on strengths and capacity rather than adopting an immediately adversarial approach. Joint and co-working between social workers supports this.
51. Protective action is taken in a proportionate way, with a low number of children being removed through urgent use of statutory powers; five were subject to emergency protection orders in the past year. All such cases evidence managerial oversight and determination, including at senior levels. Child protection enquiries, findings and consequent actions are conducted within timescales for the child and statutory expectations. Where risk or harm is evident there is a clear progression to Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), where children appropriately become the subject of a child protection plan.
52. Assessments seen were undertaken in a timescale to match the child's needs, each having an individual target for completion according to risk. Assessments are holistic, with a strong focus on significant family history, social and family networks (including using purposeful chronologies and genograms), and substantial consideration of the individual circumstances of each child in the family. For children at risk of child sexual exploitation, there is clear consideration of history and impact, child's voice, and assessment of inter-agency activity. In the past twelve months the quality of assessments has considerably improved. Those cases seen that showed earlier delay have more recently evidenced a clearer and more focused pace.
53. Assessments are revisited, updated and reviewed within child in need meetings or core groups, often after consideration by a manager or a significant change for the child. It is acknowledged that some children have not previously benefited from thorough assessments and plans, and a minority still present with limited analysis or evaluation of the child's experience. In some cases it is not evident that the ethnicity, cultural or religious characteristics of the child and family are suitably considered or factored into the assessment or the planned intervention. In others, however, children's unique characteristics are considered sensitively. In some cases, the often extensive work undertaken by practitioners with the child and family is not always fully reflected in the records.

54. Almost a third of assessments result in non-social care interventions, with well-supported step-down arrangements to targeted help. The previously high number of children with a child protection plan is reducing, from 983 in March 2013 to 643 at the time of the inspection. At the same time there is a reduction in those with a second or subsequent plan. Many children who are the subject of a second plan become so as a result of circumstances where change had not been sustained and, for others, similar difficulties within new circumstances, mostly as a result of exposure to domestic abuse.
55. Formal arrangements to consider the need for a plan are well established, with high levels of attendance from most agencies. However, the police, general practitioners, and mainstream midwifery, whilst always providing a report, do not consistently attend. This means conferences do not always benefit from a wider multi-agency discussion to evaluate the level of risk and contribute to the development of safety plans. Escalation of this concern by conference chairs and representation to police by senior leaders and the LSCB is so far without impact. Reports are routinely provided by all agencies, but are not consistently shared with or understood by parents in advance. Those children not seen as requiring a child protection plan most often benefit from a child in need plan or a targeted early help plan.
56. Conference chairing has improved in the past twelve months, with workloads reducing by a quarter and, consequently, these are now manageable. Timeliness of conferences and reviews has been at or above national averages, at over 95%. The voice of the child is increasingly heard, with 15% directly contributing to conferences, including through a formal independent advocacy service, and a large proportion otherwise having their views clearly represented by professionals who know them well and spend time with them, gaining their trust and confidence. The recently-revised consultation toolkit for children is actively used by practitioners, with the advocacy service being fully commissioned following a successful evaluation of a pilot scheme which provided 30 advocate supporters.
57. Plans produced recognise and identify the key risks, critical concerns and strengths with the family and its networks. They are, however, often task and activity focused. This makes it difficult to measure progress against the plan, and a lack of timescales for actions means parents and professionals are not clear about when things need to change over the long term. Action plans are carried through to core group considerations effectively, again with a high level of universal and targeted service collaboration. There are relatively high proportions of families' transferring in and out of the local authority area, accounting for most children ceasing plans at three months (19.5%, still below the national average), with a typical period for being on a child protection plan of between six and 15 months.

58. The very high proportion of children with child protection plans for multiple categories (72%) centres around emotional harm and neglect as a consequence of domestic abuse. Further developments to domestic abuse services are in progress, with substantial additional capacity and further integration imminent from across partner agencies; for example, a £750k investment for perpetrator programmes and the extension of a dedicated child-focused police contact point.
59. The extensive, targeted, and research-evaluated services are understood and valued by families (for example, FGC, MST, FIS), and provide intensive support where there are concerns about violence in the family, parental mental health issues, and/or parental substance or alcohol misuse. The Leeds 'Think Family, Work Family' joint safeguarding protocol specifically focuses on responding to the needs of families where these issues are evident. There is a sufficiently robust push from CSWS for families to cooperate with activities within a set timeframe. These are further supported by the recently-agreed Best Start Plan, designed to extend improvements for the safety and well-being of children. There is a city-wide MST Child Abuse and Neglect team and a robust package of training to support social workers in their understanding of neglect and their work with children and families.
60. Timely decisions are made where the restorative approach is not achieving the required change. Where parents fail to respond or to address concerns or where they show disguised or non-compliance, action is now being appropriately taken. There are a number of families where multiple or long-standing plans have not been effective. In cases seen, robust action plans are regularly reviewed by senior managers.
61. There are clear decision-making forums through the Head of Service Decision and Resource (HOSDAR) panel to discuss thresholds for possible court action, which are active and decisive in many cases where insufficient change has taken place over a lengthy period. Over the last year there has been a large increase in children moving into the Public Law Outline (PLO), and then through to family court proceedings. There have been many (39) outcomes of supervision or other orders to enforce change within a specified period. The local authority is clear that the use of these orders has been a necessary step with some families where there had been a persistent or repeated lack of sufficient change.
62. There are a very small number of children (11) with child protection plans of more than two years. At 31 March 2014 there were 13 children with a child protection plan for two years or more, this represented 1.7%, below the national level of 2.6%. At 31 March 2012 there were 4.2% (37 children) of children with a child protection plan for two years or more. This is a decrease of 65% from 31 March 2012 to 31 March 2014.

63. There are a reducing number of children becoming subject to second and subsequent plans within the last year from 20.1% in 2013-14 to 16.9% (at the time of the inspection) which is positive. This is now almost at the national average for 2013–14 which is 15.8%.
64. Arrangements for the identification, intervention in and management of significant issues of harm by adults are well understood with formal settings, such as Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The joint approach to domestic abuse is active, robust and well connected to points of service delivery. Almost all cases seen with MAPPA consideration had robust, clear, well-coordinated plans in place. In relation to MARAC, there is strong evidence of effective partnership working and use of resources to support plans involving, for example, Barnardo's, Caring Dads and the Leeds Domestic Abuse Service. This service was being substantially expanded in role and increased in capacity during the inspection. This aims to extend its role to real time support and intervention, with no delays.
65. Specialist services such as substance misuse and mental health services during the ante natal period and robust approaches through Youth Engagement Services (YOS), all target previously identified areas of complex or cross-generational need. A sustained fall in statutory interventions for offending has been achieved (27% reduction over the past 12 months), including reductions in remands and the use of custody for young people. This is well supported by the recently approved over-arching 'Best Start' strategy, designed to further extend efforts to break the cycle of harmful parenting. Mental health services for children have been the subject of review, particularly in the light of rising presentation of self-harm by young people. It is recognised that changes are needed to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision, with actions currently underway, actively promoted through the LSCB and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
66. Considerable work has been undertaken to ensure children and young people who go missing, from home, care or education are identified and supported. Responses to children who go missing from school now have extensive and assured arrangements for identification, tracking and monitoring, and there has been a considerable reduction in the number of children missing education. The number of pupils in offsite provision has fallen from 1,800 to 1,100 in the past year, and all these pupils attend alternative provision that has been quality assured by children's services to ensure that they attend and make progress and access their entitlement to 25 hours of education a week.

67. Timely information sharing across services takes place, and the development of a single data base ensures that where children and young people are missing education, they can be identified, flagged and followed up meticulously. Referral rates have increased because of better cross-agency processes to identify children missing from education and more robust recording systems. The percentage of cases closed because whereabouts are found has been 92% in the past year as a result of more robust monitoring and tracking. Numbers are affected by the fact that Leeds is a receiving city for migrants and asylum seeking children.
68. Arrangements are also well established to identify, track and meet the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion and missing from education. This includes effective partnership working between inclusion, attendance and targeted services. It is these diligent efforts which have resulted in the 39% reduction in those identified as outside mainstream education in the last year, and the 92% closure rate for effective return to education since March 2014. The use of restorative techniques with families and schools has also helped to resolve fractured relationships between schools and parents. More than 120 children have made transitions back into school over the last four terms.
69. These arrangements are linked well to service provision to understand and respond to children and young people vulnerable to, or experiencing, CSE. A coordinator has been appointed who provides a strategic and professional lead for children who are missing or at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation. The coordinator has an overview of all incidences of children running away from home or care, updates the missing data base and sits alongside the police coordinator to identify children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation.
70. There has been a strong commitment to developing practitioner awareness of CSE through targeted training. A risk identification tool is used in all cases where child sexual exploitation is suspected and in all return home interviews. Return home interviews seen during the inspection (22) were undertaken in a timely way and in accordance with the level of assessed risk and complexity. All 182 children and young people reported missing in the past six months have had a return home conversation with a professional to ascertain if they are safe and well.

71. The number of young people identified as vulnerable to child sexual exploitation has more than doubled in the last year (153 at the time of inspection). This indicates an improved focus in this area rather than more children at risk of harm. While most (89%) are female, it is recognised that further efforts are needed in relation to young males. Identification and risk assessment through intelligence sharing and joint agency tasking in response to identified need are taking place and continuing to improve as capacity is added. All vulnerability and risk plans seen by inspectors (26) had a clear, robust risk assessment and suitable plans in addition to other, child in need, protection or looked after, plans in place.
72. Lead professionals within targeted services provide consultation and training for practitioners working with those vulnerable to, or having experienced child sexual exploitation, providing support through specialist knowledge and skills. Services and coordination across the area is planned, from April 2015, to be provided through the additional capacity of a dedicated, specialist multi-agency team of social workers and police officers. The aim is to coordinate planning, training, development and intelligence and link with targeted support hubs that include trained practitioners from youth services, health, youth offending, parenting support and the police.
73. Important contributions from the voluntary sector agencies such as Barnardo's and ISIS (a Leeds-based group) are providing counselling and support services to children and their families exposed to child sexual exploitation. Inspectors spoke to one young person receiving services who said she 'now feels safe and knows staff care about her'.
74. While support services are currently provided by these agencies, the hub approach is planned to bring greater coordination of effort, linking with the specialist social workers and intelligence team. There have been nine prosecutions in the last year; however, there has been limited use of child abduction notices. Police are aware of this issue and have an action plan in place. Prevention and disruption activities are also proceeding, with evidence of a number of operations being undertaken across the area.
75. Other areas of potential risk or harm being well addressed include the identification, assessment and approval of children in private fostering situations. This is considerably improved, from being judged inadequate in 2008. Year-on-year increases have been made from a low base and progress is now better than the national average. Specialist workers are proactive and tenacious, maintaining compliance with regulations. Assessments seen are at least satisfactory and some are good. Effective partnership working was seen between the local authority and immigration authorities in considering the potential for trafficking or other forms of exploitation.

76. The advice, guidance, direction and activity provided by the local authority designated officer (LADO) are welcomed by key agencies (with particularly positive regard by the head teachers who spoke to inspectors), as are the clarity and focus of activity in the monitoring and oversight of incidents and their resolution. Most referrals are made by schools, residential children's homes and the fostering service. There is a timely response and follow up by the two officers involved.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
<p>Summary</p> <p>Decisions made to look after children and young people are robust, with effective systems that ensure that thresholds are applied appropriately and that delay is avoided. Children’s and young people’s views are heard and the professionals who work with them know them well.</p> <p>Children and young people are cared for within their immediate or extended family wherever possible, and a range of innovative methods are used to support this. Court orders are used to secure good outcomes and are often used to support care within a child’s or young person’s extended family. Placement stability has improved over recent years and is now good. Clear consideration is given to the needs of individual children and whether they should live with their brothers and sisters. Where this is not possible, arrangements are in place to facilitate appropriate levels of contact.</p> <p>Stringent efforts are made to maintain a young person within their school placement even when the home placement breaks down. Looked after young people do not all attend good or better schools. All looked after children and young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is regularly reviewed, although the content and quality of PEPs is inconsistent.</p> <p>Adoption as a permanency option is considered early for children where care proceedings are being initiated. The local authority has substantially reduced the number of children waiting to be adopted, with 128 children adopted in the last year. Leeds is ranked equal 16th of all authorities for the percentage of children adopted, and had more children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds adopted (11%) than the national average (8%).</p> <p>Services for care leavers are good. Strong multi-agency partnerships have significantly improved outcomes in education, employment and training. Accommodation with former foster carers or in independent living is suitable and safe. They are well supported by tenacious staff. Care leavers are not always provided with sufficient information regarding their health history or entitlements.</p>	

77. Decisions to look after children are appropriate and children are not taken into care unless it is necessary. Extensive interventions are made to ensure that children and young people remain in their families where it is safe to do so. There are appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that decision making and thresholds are applied appropriately and, for the most part, delay is avoided.
78. The Public Law Outline is used to ensure that children are only taken into care when this is in their best interests. Placements under Section 20 Children Act 1989 are carefully considered to ensure that the 'no order' principle is appropriately applied. Family Group Conferences are used extensively to try to ensure that, wherever possible, children are looked after within their extended families. MST is used effectively with families where children are on the edge of care, and this has been successful in preventing children being taken into care unnecessarily, with 95% of young people remaining with their families.
79. Permanence planning at the earliest opportunity is high on the agenda of social workers, managers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's). For the period March to May 2014, 91% of children had a clear permanence plan by their four month review, and the plan was progressing in 95% of cases.
80. Care proceedings are timely, within an average timescale of 26 weeks. Leeds is described as "the best performing local authority in West Yorkshire" by the judiciary, who note significant improvements in the quality of care applications and evidence-based decision making, all of which is leading to more timely legal permanence for children. In cases where there has been delay, the causes have been analysed to assist with future improvements.
81. Joint work between the Family Court Division and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) has strengthened processes and consolidated thresholds. This means that there is increased confidence in the reports from children's social care and, therefore, fewer independent assessments required, thus reducing delay. The judiciary speak very highly of the authority and have supported Leeds' bid for a Family Drug and Alcohol Court and the authority's successful innovation bid to expand restorative family group decision making. There are already improved outcomes for children in terms of earlier identification of kinship carers.
82. Careful consideration is given to matching children and young people to appropriate families. There is evidence of innovative methods of family finding being used to ensure that children and young people, especially those who are harder to place, are matched with a suitable carer. This has included profiling events where children can be matched to potential carers. When matching children to carers, the wishes and feelings of the child are given clear consideration.

83. Placement stability has improved in recent years and is better than the national average. In 2013–14 the number of looked after children with three or more placements was 8%, with Leeds ranking 16th in the country for this measure, and first in the country for young people staying with foster carers post-16. The majority of carers, including foster carers and kinship carers, are positive about the support that they receive to enable them to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.
84. Children looked after benefit from having social workers and managers who know them well. Social workers visit children in a timely way and spend time with them getting to know their likes and dislikes. Social workers talked animatedly, and with pride, about the children they were working with. Whilst they describe high aspirations for children, this is not always reflected in the written records. Where professionals have built up a close relationship with a young person, in order to provide continuity they have maintained contact when the young person has been placed away from home, even if the child has been transferred to another social work team within the authority.
85. There are clear expectations that all workers should be outcome focused in their work with children. Every child and young person has a care plan which is updated prior to every review, and clearly links to assessed need however issues relating to their identity are not always fully explored. The current care planning format, however, does not make it easy for social workers to evidence the overarching plan for the child and, importantly, to show the long-term goals. This makes it difficult for children and young people to understand their future journey. The authority recognises that it now needs to move away from a model of compliance and focus on the quality of plans, as this varies across the city.
86. Assessments and planning seen in relation to children and young people with a disability accessing short breaks contain outcome-focused actions which clearly link to identified needs. All assessments seen have been updated within the last year and all demonstrate consideration of brothers and sisters, some to a great degree and with good analysis of the impact of the child's disability on other family members as well as on themselves. Parental needs and children's needs are balanced, as are potential risk factors, and the purpose of accessing short breaks in terms of family and child needs is well considered.
87. In some of the cases tracked and sampled, children and young people have experienced historic instability, changes of social worker and placement moves. This has improved significantly in the past 12 months, with children experiencing greater stability and living in placements that are appropriate and meeting their needs. Some cases were seen where this historic instability has been well considered in terms of current emotional well-being, with appropriate plans in place to respond to young people's current and emerging needs, although this is still not yet consistent.

88. There are some innovative placements which have been commissioned to meet the needs of individual children and brothers and sisters when deciding on an appropriate placement. The 'siblings together or apart' assessments are strong and show consideration for the needs of individual children and how these will best be met. One example was seen of a group of six siblings who are placed together. There are good arrangements which ensure that children maintain safe and appropriate contact with their families and friends.
89. When the plan is for a child to return home, assessments are robust and consider the needs of the child and the potential risks. None was seen where this was not an appropriate decision, and management oversight of the decision was always clearly recorded. Support is offered to enable the placement to succeed, and reviews are regular. The local authority plans to introduce a pilot MST project aimed at helping young people with complex needs to return to their homes. Staff in children's homes have already received training in order to provide an intensive therapeutic environment for young people with challenging behaviour. The aim is to work with the young people for two months whilst a therapist works with the family. The plan is that young people will then be returned home and a standard 20-week MST intervention will assist the reunification. This pilot is due to start in the next couple of months and preparations are well underway.
90. Placement stability is good. Only 8% of children looked after in Leeds (105 out of 1,340) at the end of March 2014 had experienced three or more placements during 2013–14, compared to an England average of 11%. Efforts to increase the offer and support to foster carers have resulted in several foster carers moving to Leeds from Independent Fostering Agencies. There has been a recent drop in applications to foster, but this is due to targeting recruitment specifically at carers who are able to care for teenagers and young people with more complex needs, in order to meet the changing profile of the local looked after population.
91. Foster carers are assessed appropriately. Fostering panel chairs meet every six months with the local authority to feed back any issues and to ensure a consistent approach across the city. Panel chairs are sufficiently well trained and committed to maintaining good standards of practice. In the first six months of 2014–15 there has been a net gain of 14 foster carers. Out of 40 de-registrations during the period March to September 2014, 18 were due to positive outcomes for children. This included 14 young people where the carer continued to care for the child under a Special Guardianship Order, two where the child returned to live with parents and two where the young person reached 18 and began living independently.

92. The Leeds Foster Carers Association provides extra support, and foster carers can access independent support and advice, which they see as beneficial. Foster carers are positive about the support they receive and clearly enjoy their role. They feel that their views are listened to, as are those of the children for whom they care. They feel a part of the professional team supporting the child. Foster carers spoke positively about the training they received, although few had accessed training in relation to child sexual exploitation, which is a gap. A number of foster carers responding to the services on line fostering survey have commented on the need to improve training opportunities particularly where siblings in placements have different levels of need.
93. Currently 92% of the looked after population live within 20 miles of their home. Decisions to place young people out of the area are based on a thorough assessment of risk and needs and how these will be addressed. Two children placed out of area were seen by inspectors and both spoke positively about the places where they lived and the support that they received. Their care plans evidenced good consideration of their needs and appropriate arrangements in place prior to placement to meet health and education needs.
94. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) meet children between reviews and spend time getting to know them. They often chair reviews for brothers and sisters, even when they are not living together, to ensure stability and consistency. Reviews are timely and caseloads are manageable. This is despite IROs having taken on the responsibility to chair the first review after a Supervision Order has been granted, and to chair three reviews for care leavers following their 18th birthday. Many examples have been seen of appropriate challenge by the IRO, and escalation to senior managers where care plans have not been sufficiently robust or where actions had not been followed up. The Quality Assurance Process effectively monitors compliance and there has been an improvement in many areas.
95. When children go missing from care they receive an independent return home interview which appropriately addresses presenting issues. All interviews seen by inspectors (22) were undertaken in a timely way and according to the level of perceived risk and complexity. There was consideration of 'push and pull' factors in all cases and the child sexual exploitation risk matrix was undertaken where appropriate. There have been 141 return home interviews undertaken, which amounts to 77.5%. The local authority is aware in all cases where return home interviews are not undertaken and robust follow-up is undertaken by the Missing Coordinator. While information from return home interviews is collated, it is not yet being analysed sufficiently to inform preventative work and identify emerging patterns and trends.

96. Initial and annual health needs assessments are completed in over 90% of cases and robustly address children's and young people's holistic needs, including the need for sexual health services, substance misuse services or therapeutic assistance. There has been some detailed analysis of the overall health needs of looked after children, which is assisting with commissioning arrangements. Leeds is proactive in undertaking assessments for all children who live within 80 miles of the city. This ensures swift access to health services and assists with consistency for children regardless of where they live. Clear contracting and commissioning arrangements mean that inspectors saw no child who was placed out of the Leeds area who did not have education and health provision in place.
97. Thresholds for CAMHS are high and there is a maximum 18-week wait for assessments, (average wait 9.6 weeks), although looked after children can be 'fast-tracked' to a child psychiatrist if this is felt to be necessary. Counselling services are available through a commissioned service, and the local authority also offers an in-house social work therapeutic service. This is well-received by carers, and has made a demonstrable difference to children as well as supporting carers to effectively care for children with complex and challenging needs.
98. Drug and Alcohol services are currently provided by a commissioned service. Referrals have increased over the last few years due to systematic improvements in care pathways. This service is being re-commissioned so that services can be provided for young people up to the age of 25, as the current service only provides for young people of 19 or under.
99. The wide use of Family Group Conferences has led to an increase in children who are placed within their extended family, including the use of kinship carers, supervision orders and special guardianship orders. Supervision orders are sometimes used to support kinship carers in the initial stages of a placement. This work has meant that 48% of children and young people in care are placed with their extended family. There are opportunities for further analysis of pre-proceedings work, which might assist with future service planning. For example, looking at those cases which did, and those which did not, end in proceedings and drawing out themes.

100. Over the past two years there has been good improvement in the attendance and attainment of primary-aged looked after pupils. In 2014 results in reading, writing and mathematics were above the national average for similar pupils, and the gap between looked after pupils' achievements and other pupils in Leeds is narrower than that found nationally for similar groups. In 2014, the average point score gap between Year 6 looked after pupils in Leeds and other pupils was around a year, whilst the gap between similar groups nationally was over a year and a term. Year 11 looked after students' results in 2013 were well above similar pupils nationally and the gap between their achievements and other pupils in Leeds was narrower than that found for similar groups nationally. In 2014 the proportion achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths, dipped, as it did nationally, and at 13% performance was slightly above that of similar pupils. Nevertheless, this placed the local authority in the top 24 of all authorities for looked after students' achievements, and the gap between looked after students' achievements and other Leeds students continues to be narrower than that found nationally for like groups.
101. Improvements made to the virtual school over the last eighteen months and the strengthening of partnership working and accountability within the 25 clusters in Leeds is driving improvement effectively. The virtual school head teacher tracks pupils' attendance weekly and achievements termly. Current information indicates that over 80% of primary school-aged pupils are making at least expected progress and over 60% better than expected progress in their learning. Around a quarter of Key Stage 4 looked after students are on track to achieve grade A to C in their English and mathematics GCSEs this year, an improvement on last year.
102. Head teachers speak positively about the improved work of the virtual school and the way that they are increasingly held to account individually, collectively for the attainment and achievement of looked after children in Leeds. The virtual school is providing strong leadership, valuable training and support. Cluster arrangements are effective at identifying needs and offering timely early help to pupils.
103. Until recently, the virtual school has not held head teachers to account robustly enough for the use or impact of additional government funding for looked after pupils (the pupil premium) on their achievements in school. The virtual school head has very recently put in place new arrangements for the payment of the Pupil Premium to provide more accountability, but it is too soon to see the impact of this in Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
104. The virtual school head teacher knows that PEPs are not yet consistently good. She is working with school leaders, designated looked after teachers and social workers to improve the content and quality of the plans, including sharper, specific and measurable targets to ensure that aspirational targets are set, checked and achieved.

105. Partnership work with schools has had a positive impact on reducing the number of pupils excluded or at risk of exclusion. All staff work well to encourage positive behaviour and motivate pupils. As a result of this approach, only one looked after pupil has been permanently excluded in the past three years and the proportion excluded for fixed periods has been continually below that of similar pupils nationally. The current rate is 7.2%, compared to 9.8% nationally.
106. The virtual school head teacher and missing children teams take prompt action to ensure that all looked after children access their full entitlement to education. Staff support a small number of pupils (22) at risk of exclusion effectively through the city's pupil referral units, which were judged good at the time of the last published inspection report. An additional 26 pupils are in alternative provision in schools locally. This provision has been quality assured by children's services to ensure that pupils are safe, provided with a suitable education and attend regularly. Staff ensure that looked after children missing education attend regularly and are protected from harm. As a result, none are 'open' on the missing children register. The virtual school head teacher keeps a very close watch on pupils at risk of child sexual exploitation, and takes decisive action to reduce risks through careful determination of a suitable school place where needed and multi-agency support.
107. Of looked after children in primary schools, 83% are currently in good or better schools, which is similar to that of all pupils in Leeds and slightly above the average for all pupils nationally. The picture is not as positive at secondary age pupils, where the proportion is 63% compared to the national average of 71% and Leeds average of 65%. Meticulous work is carried out to ensure that pupils are in provision that meets their needs. Rigorous commissioning procedures are in place to ensure that pupils placed in provision out of the city are in good or better provision, and educational professionals visit schools regularly to ensure that the provision is appropriate and that pupils are making good progress. Head teachers reported positively on the direct work that is undertaken to ensure stability of school placement when home placements break down.
108. The local authority and its partners have worked closely together to ensure that looked after children and their carers have access to a range of social and leisure activities. Work in partnership with the Child Friendly Leeds initiative has ensured that a range of benefits and discounts are available, which are provided by local and national businesses. Looked after children, care leavers and the families who care for them have access to free sports facilities and reduced price entry to several leisure attractions.

109. The independent visitor (IV) scheme is demonstrating signs of improved performance and effectiveness, with an increase in both the number of people coming forward as independent visitors and in the number of young people matched to IV's. The scheme has undergone a rebranding, with a new newsletter and leaflet, which is contributing to the increased interest. The overall number of children and young people currently matched has increased since the end of March last year, from 25 to 97. Of 60 young people waiting for an Independent Visitor, 19 are currently being matched. On average, children and young people are matched within three months of a request for an Independent Visitor. Child Friendly Leeds has been promoting the Independent Visitor's scheme; it has run stalls and staff engagement events in major retailers in the city, where they have talked informally to staff about what being an independent visitor involves.
110. The 'Have a Voice' Council is an active group of young people who are looked after, including some who live out of the local authority area. Council members have influenced policy developments, attended local authority meetings, been involved in training and recruitment, and in the development of the 'passport to independence', which is used to help prepare young people for leaving care. This is a new initiative and not all young people are yet aware of it. Council members have helped to rewrite the local authority's pledge, which was re-launched in 2014 as the 'Promise', and have produced a colourful and informative newsletter. Looked after young people's achievements are celebrated at the STARS awards events, with awards being tailored to the individuals' interests; young people are supported to arrange the events with dedicated participation workers. Looked after children understand how to complain, but they are not always clear about their entitlements.
111. The Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) is a multi-agency group which has strategic responsibility for developing services and practice in relation to looked after children. There is strong partner agency commitment, with over 90 partners represented across the sub-groups; for example, care leavers, education and training, 0-5 entering care, health and well-being, and the 'Enjoy' sub-group, which is also working to reduce the offending behaviour of looked after young people. This has resulted in close partnership working with the police to divert young people away from the criminal justice system. The number of looked after children offending has declined year on year from 14% in 2008-09 to 4% in 2013-14. Positive partnership work is undertaken to ensure that children are protected from bullying, homophobic behaviour and hate crimes.

The graded judgement for adoption is good

112. The local authority demonstrates a sense of urgency and care in all adoption work. Adoption as a permanency option is considered at the earliest opportunity for all children where care proceedings are being initiated. The service is represented at HOSDAR panel, which decides whether to initiate the Public Law Outline. This ensures that the service is aware of children whose ultimate care plan may result in adoption, and enables effective means of profiling adopters to match children's needs.
113. The local authority has substantially reduced the number of children waiting to be adopted, with 128 children adopted in the last year. Leeds is ranked equal 16th of all authorities for the percentage of children adopted, and had more children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds adopted (11%) than the national average (8%).
114. The authority's performance against the Department for Education's adoption scorecard shows an increasing trajectory of improvement in performance. The period from a child entering care to moving in with their adoptive family is 564 days for the three-year average period 2011–14. This is 64 days fewer and therefore better than the England three year average, and better than statistical neighbours, but is 17 days away from the national decreasing target.
115. The average time 2011–14 from receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding a match to an adoptive family is 239 days, which is 22 days longer than the England three-year average, but better than statistical neighbours, though 87 days away from the national decreasing target.
116. The local authority, along with Barnardo's, is leading on the development of the Yorkshire and Humber adoption consortium's Early Permanency Project (fostering to adopt). The authority currently has nine such adopters approved and six children in fostering to adopt placements, which allows for the children to have placement stability and an opportunity to form primary attachments without subsequent placement moves.
117. There has been significant investment in the adoption service, with a further adoption team being established 18 months ago by utilising funds from the Adoption Reform Grant. This is having a positive impact upon children's placement stability, security and permanency into adulthood, with the number of children exiting care through adoption increasing.

118. Inspectors saw robust management oversight of cases and tenacity in adoption plans being pursued, which in one case included a child who had experienced an adoption disruption. Children do not experience unnecessary delay. The recruitment team has particularly focused on recruiting early permanency placement carers for babies and children aged 0-2, who can foster a baby during care proceedings and will go on to adopt should the placement order be granted. There has also been a significant focus on recruiting adopters for sibling groups between the ages of three and six years, and children over the age of two years who show signs of developmental delay or whose future is uncertain. Children do not experience multiple moves, and therefore are provided with stability whilst waiting to be found a suitable match. Overall, the local authority is showing improvement in the two key time indicators for the adoption process. Whilst timescales continue to be above the thresholds set, the local authority performed better against its statistical neighbours.
119. The local authority had 50 children waiting for adoptive families at the point of the inspection. Of the 50 children waiting, seven have been matched to adoptive families awaiting a panel decision, 10 have been linked to adopters and 11 have foster carers currently being assessed who have expressed an interest in adoption. There are three cases where parents are contesting placement orders and a further three children for whom family finding is appropriately on hold. The authority is actively family finding for 15 children, most of whom are sibling groups. One child is about to be placed with siblings through early permanence. Where adoption is the plan for children, the service will endeavour to find the most appropriate match for the child in a timely way.
120. In 2013–14 there were 30 children who were placed in a total of 15 sibling groups. This helped them to maintain close bonds, and no children were separated where it was assessed that they should remain together.
121. The proportion of adoptive families who were matched to a child during 2013–14 who waited more than three months from approval to being matched to a child is 63%, which is higher than the national average of 58%, and an area that needs more attention. However, the local authority matched over 78% of adopters within six months in 2013–14 and increased the number of adopters during the same period (75 in 2012–13 and 83 in 2013–14). Currently the service has 28 adopters waiting to be matched: seven are booked onto panel, three have had links identified, 13 have been referred to the adoption register and five have been approved in less than three months.
122. Actions being undertaken to recruit adopters are effective, and a broad range of media is utilised, some of which are innovative; for example, using Google pay adverts with a link to the local authority's adoption team web pages, which provide detailed information about the adoption process and mock profiles of children requiring adoptive homes. The service has a dedicated website, 'Adopt4Leeds'.

123. In 2013-14, Leeds Adoption service ran 14 information sessions for prospective adopters. Adverts are informed by research and are inclusive in nature to attract a diverse profile of adopters. More recently, since October 2014, targeted recruitment is being undertaken in an effort to match children with particular needs more swiftly, with assessments being prioritised to this end. A broad range of means are used to find adoptive families for children, for example: 21 children recently attended activity days (resulting in 5 matches); professionally produced DVDs profile children to adopters; and the recent use of an online family finding resource available to adoption agencies and adopters. All of these are successfully contributing to reducing the number of children awaiting adoptive homes.
124. If an in-house match is unavailable three months after the adoption decision, children and adopters are referred to the Yorkshire and Humber Consortium and National Register. Where children are identified as likely to be more challenging to place (e.g. sibling groups, older children or children with complex needs) they are referred immediately, in order to prevent delay in finding suitable adopters. Some adopters prefer to wait to be found a match by their local agency. Timescales for completing assessments of prospective adopters have recently improved; 72% of the last 33 households to be approved were completed within the Stage 1 and Stage 2 timescales. Where assessments are delayed there is good reason, for example potential adopters not ready to progress to the next stage and the service prioritising assessments where children are waiting to be matched.
125. The local authority service is proactive and recently helped to facilitate a regional conference for approved adopters who are yet to be matched due to their profile being for a match to the 0–2 age range; this was an effort to include children who are waiting, such as children with different ethnicities and those with disabilities and/or additional needs.
126. Four adoption panels have been held each month to prevent delays in approving and matching children, and this has recently reduced to three to reflect current levels of work within the service. The adoption panels have independent chairs who are effectively fulfilling their roles, for example, completing performance reports on the quality of reports presented to panel. Minutes are of a good standard, with the vast majority clearly stating reasons for recommendations made. Six-monthly meetings are held with the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to reflect on performance regarding the quality of reports and operational issues relating to panel matters, and panel chairs feels empowered to raise issues outside meetings should the need arise.

127. Adoption reports completed are of a good standard. Child permanence reports provide a clear account of the child's history and the analysis provides evidence as to why adoption is being pursued. Permanence reports are updated to take account of children's developments to support family finding efforts. Prospective adopter reports are well written, and some seen include attachment style interviews to assess the prospective adopters' emotional resilience, which is considered in decision making when identifying an appropriate match.
128. Prospective adopters spoke very positively about their experience of the local authority's adoption service, from the point of attending an adoption information session, through the assessment process and on to the child being placed.
129. Life story books seen, in the main, provide children with a child-centred account of their histories, although they could be enhanced by ensuring that they only include information that is relevant and positive for the child. One book seen included a lovely letter from the foster carer, which was heartening to see and will be endearing for the child to read. Later in life letters seen are of a satisfactory standard and include key information and events, although they would benefit from being more personal.
130. The Adoption Support Service includes a former teacher who receives support from a member of the virtual school team to ensure that adoptive children access appropriate education and support in schools. The Adoption Reform Grant was used to fund two additional staff to provide more capacity in the team in an effort to ensure that the increasing number of children being adopted receive timely and effective post-adoption support.
131. Case sampling of adoption support cases shows team managers setting social workers unnecessarily lengthy timescales over which to undertake adoption support. This is making adherence to timescales difficult to achieve and is ineffective, as children and adopters are receiving support throughout the assessment process. Adoption support plans are well written and provide evidence of robust support packages provided to children and adopters. Plans would be further strengthened if they contained measurable targets and outcomes, which is a missed opportunity to gauge progress and ensure that the support provided is effective.
132. The service is currently providing adoption support to 163 children. There are 12 children waiting for adoption support, who had been waiting less than two weeks at the time of inspection. Adoption support is being provided to 49 adults, of whom 16 are birth parents. The number of pre-order cases receiving individual support from the Adoption Support Team is six.

133. An array of creative and effective support is available to adopters and children. Examples of services provided include: participation in a pilot parenting programme based on neuroscience, social learning theory and attachment theory; therapy courses, which promote therapeutic styles of play to support children to develop attachments to their adopters; and workshops on contact, adolescents and education, and training on the safe use of social networks.
134. Specific groups for children include the 'The Cooking Crew', a social group with Barnardo's Futures for adopted children aged 12 to 14 years to cook and do play/craft activities, and a group for adopted adolescents who are receiving a service from CAMHS. The services are highly valued by adopters and help to promote children's self-esteem and identities as adopted children. The number of placements disruptions is low, with four disruptions during 2013-14 compared to 5 in 2012/13). All four disruptions related to placements made outside of the local authority and not assessed by Leeds staff. The low number of disruptions is positive in the context of the increasing number of children adopted. Lessons are being learned with analysis taking place and shared with staff and panel members. Support to birth parents is provided for as long as it is needed by an independent agency, through counselling and intermediary services. Birth parents receive information of their entitlement to receive an assessment of their support needs. Letterbox contact is assisted by the adoption support team, which facilitated 1,000 exchanges in the last year. All adopters spoken with during the inspection rated the service highly and would recommend it; they were particularly complimentary about the support available after an adoption order.

The graded judgement for care leavers is good

135. Currently Leeds City Council has 475 care leavers, with the vast majority living either with family and friends, in assured short-hold tenancies, student accommodation or local authority tenancies. The authority is in touch with 85% of care leavers on a regular basis, which rises to 92% when the yearly birthday contact is included for all care leavers aged over 19. Tenacious staff make every effort to contact care leavers.
136. The local authority has invested heavily in care leaving services and prioritised them, which has had positive results. Care leavers experience staff who are persistent in their attempts to engage with them and in providing support. Outcomes for care leavers in their education, employment and training, for example, are above national figures and continuing to improve. The most recent data indicate that 289 (57%) of care leavers are in education, employment and training, which remains well above average for this group (45%) and is a slight improvement on the previous year's performance.

137. The authority monitors where care leavers are not in education, employment and training (NEET), and there are currently 187 such young people. Ten of these are in custody, 32 are pregnant or parenting and 18 have a disability, all of which means the young person is not in a position to access employment or training. Robust attempts are made to engage the remaining 127 young people, which include specifically targeted work groups with Connexions and personal advisors, regular events held across the city around employment opportunities and training and a specific MALAP sub-group with a focus on EET. Pathway plans are independently reviewed by IROs, where specific plans for a young person's education are discussed, and all staff in the six teams have recently had training to equip them with information and advice to support young people to access EET opportunities.
138. The local authority actively encourages care leavers to continue their education or to access training, and has a strategy to ensure that more care leavers can access apprenticeships within the authority as well as elsewhere locally. There are 20 care leavers currently in local authority apprenticeships, which demonstrate the authority's commitment to, and effectiveness in raising the aspirations of young people, and their profile within the city.
139. Work to develop relationships with colleges and training provision to ensure that care leavers are supported in their placements has improved outcomes over the past year and reduced the number of young people leaving courses prematurely. There has been a significant improvement in the proportion of care leavers moving on to higher education. Whilst none made a successful transition to university in 2013, this year 52 care leavers (11%) have done so and are settled in their courses, a higher proportion than for care leavers nationally. The package of practical and emotional support provided to care leavers once in university is good, for instance in ensuring that they are visited and can return to foster carers in vacations where this is appropriate. Young people attending university are given a range of financial support above and beyond the expected national entitlements.
140. Leeds has established a strategic group to support accommodation for vulnerable young people. This has ensured that there is a good range of accommodation available to meet the needs of care leavers. For those care leavers who wish to remain with their current foster carers after their 18th birthday, the local authority's 'staying put' policy is encouraging them to do so where foster carers also wish it. The policy is clear and foster carers are positive about the scheme, which is having a significant impact in providing more continuity for care leavers. Nineteen per cent of care leavers are currently with their former foster carers in these arrangements, but amongst those who have left care recently, this figure rises to 36%.

141. Care leavers' views are influential in deciding whether and when independent living is right for them. A wide range of emotional and practical support is provided. Personal advisors, floating support and commissioned services promote independent living skills and support young people to develop emotional resilience and the confidence to make safe and appropriate transitions into adulthood. Inspectors saw no cases where the timing of the move towards independent living was inappropriate.
142. Commissioning arrangements ensure that housing provision is suitable and 285 (60%) of care leavers are living in independent accommodation. Strong partnership arrangements ensure that care leavers are given priority by the local authority and partners for permanent tenancies. The range of accommodation is wide, and young people have options of long-term supported housing. The location of care leavers' housing is suitable and affordable and they feel safe. Inspectors visited accommodation in one supported housing provision in a residential area, where the furnishings and equipment were of a good standard and the décor was attractive. Care leavers decorate their accommodation to their own taste. Care leavers spoke favourably to inspectors about this provision: 'it's like our home'.
143. Care leavers live in suitable accommodation in almost all cases. Where accommodation is unsuitable, swift action is taken to support the young person into alternative provision. Weekly housing meetings of key agencies effectively look at incoming demand, applications and those care leavers experiencing difficulties in current placements. As a result, there are no care leavers placed in multi-occupancy housing or homeless, and there have been no care leavers in bed and breakfast for several years. Only six care leavers have been placed in hostel accommodation in the past year, and five of these moved within the local authority target of seven days. In the past year, 25 care leavers have been placed in emergency accommodation, of whom 16 moved on within the planned timescale of 28 days. Since establishing the weekly housing meeting, no care leavers have stayed beyond this 28 day target.
144. The number of care leavers in custody (10) is low. Where care leavers are in custody there are appropriate arrangements for their discharge and support arrangements to reintegrate them into the community and, where possible, manage safe relationships and behaviour.
145. The local authority has an effective scheme for ensuring that if care leavers are waiting for their first welfare benefits payments they are financially supported over during that period. Leaving care entitlements include appropriate basic grants, but with the option of a number of additional payments which, overall, make a substantial package. However, some care leavers are not given sufficient information to know about and consistently access their entitlements. The online Youth Information Hub, which is replacing written information for care leavers, does not yet contain sufficient information on those entitlements.

146. Health assessments are offered by looked after children nurses, who show persistence in encouraging care leavers to access health services, such as dental checks and more specialised services, including for sexual health. Care leavers almost always have their NHS cards. However, their health history is not being consistently shared with them. Inspectors saw examples where the emotional well-being of care leavers is being well addressed, for instance regarding child sexual exploitation. In other examples, care leavers were not engaging with services or their needs had not been identified rigorously through the pathway plan. Where young people have a disability, close relationships with adult social care ensures that a transitions worker is allocated to co-work with personal advisors, which supports a good understanding of the young person's needs and creates an opportunity for trusting relationships to develop and transfer into adult services.
147. Substance misuse among care leavers is low. Personal advisers provide help and advice through direct interventions or by securing support from other services to meet either substance misuse, drugs or alcohol problems. Services such which provide support to young people misusing substances and alcohol are appropriately prioritised for care leavers. Care leavers at risk of sexual exploitation are appropriately safeguarded. The local authority has appointed a project worker to work extensively with looked after children and care leavers, providing advocacy, attention, access and assertive outreach.
148. IROs review pathway plans, which ensure independent scrutiny and appropriate challenge. Plans address appropriate areas, such as whether the care leaver has a passport and bank account. Care leavers' views are gathered well regarding their plan and inspectors saw examples of cultural and religious needs being carefully addressed. For care leavers in supported lodgings, the living together arrangement provides the necessary level of detail regarding which areas of independence the care leaver needs most help with. However, other pathway plans often lack the necessary detail about individual targets for the care leavers to enhance their independence and development, including budgeting. This makes it difficult to accurately measure the extent of their progress.
149. Care leavers are seen regularly and supported by committed and skilled staff, and they appreciate these efforts; 'they don't give up on you', one said. There is a strong emphasis on providing continuity of social worker, and care leavers are confident that they will continue to receive support into adulthood. Personal advisers have a good understanding of the needs of their care leavers and the risks to their safety locally.

150. Complaints from care leavers are infrequent, and are investigated thoroughly when they are made. However, care leavers meet with social workers and personal advisors in locality offices, which are often not suitable for this purpose, in terms of access. The local authority has already identified this issue and has suitably ambitious plans to improve care leavers' access to services. Care leavers have good access to free leisure activities.
151. Care leavers' achievements are celebrated well through the local authority's Star Awards. Care leavers and children who are looked after arrange the awards with the support of participation workers. Events to celebrate achievements are regular and include senior managers, elected members and local celebrities. Care leavers who have received these awards value them. There has been a steady development of the role of the Care Leavers Council in ensuring that the voice of care leavers is better heard. For instance, a member of the Care Leavers Council co-chairs the meetings which monitor care leaver services. Care leavers have been involved in developing services such as the Passport to Independence and in recruiting staff.
152. The local authority has created a number of useful structures to monitor care services and drive improvements, such as weekly meetings with housing providers to problem solve and explore demand. The authority acknowledges that in implementing a new computer system some management information regarding care leavers is not yet sufficiently accessible to establish a strategic overview.

Key judgement	Judgement grade
Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p>Summary</p> <p>Strong governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance. Effective communication and a shared ambition for children mean that the Chief Executive, Director of Children’s Services, Lead Member and senior management team share a comprehensive knowledge of what is happening on the front line. They are ambitious and influential in changing the lives of local children, young people and families. The local authority has further invested in children’s services and continues to do so. This financial commitment, together with long-term coherent, strategic planning, is ensuring a sustainable service for children and families, with a substantial investment in a restorative approach at the core of social work practice.</p> <p>There are effective and accountable arrangements in place for the oversight of the LSCB, and partners work effectively together to safeguard children and young people. Senior leaders and partners have high aspirations and share a vision on behalf of children and families, for Leeds to be the best city for children to grow up in, and to become a centre of excellence for social work. The authority’s priority for Leeds to be a child friendly city is well reflected both in strategic planning and operationally, with children at the heart of any action undertaken.</p> <p>Much work has been completed by the authority since 2009 to strengthen service provision and to ensure that children are safeguarded. A well-planned restructure of children’s services in 2012 that was fully informed by research, has provided firm foundations underpinning effective and timely provision of early, targeted and specialist support services for children and families in need of help and protection.</p> <p>A culture of learning and continuous professional development is well established and continues to develop. Stability and the increasing expertise of the workforce, together with strengthened managerial oversight, is improving the quality of social work practice. However, there is more to do to if the authority is to meet its ambition of providing outstanding services for children, including: embedding outcome focused planning; improving learning from case audits; helping managers to use performance data confidently; and ensuring that managers agree challenging learning goals with social workers and reinforce this through reflective supervision.</p>	

153. The Director of Children's Services has comprehensive and current knowledge of what is happening at the front line and provides effective and ambitious leadership. Collectively, the leadership team has a very accurate view of its strengths and of things that need to be better, and leaders are taking robust action to improve those areas in partnership with schools, targeted and early help services.
154. Relationships between senior leaders and the LSCB are very strong. The Chief Executive and Lead Member appropriately hold the LSCB Chair to account for the effective working of the LSCB.
155. A well-structured performance management framework is facilitating effective information sharing across the city and at a local level. Further improvement work is identified and well underway, including for example, the extrapolation of performance data from the electronic recording system to further promote frontline managers' and social workers' understanding of their performance and how it can be improved.
156. Performance monitoring arrangements are robust and are consistently well used to inform members, leaders, operational managers and the partnership of trends and dips in performance. The application of the outcomes based accountability approach to performance is facilitating a shared understanding of priorities for children, and the local authority is embedding a culture of 'high support and high challenge' across the service. Managers, practitioners and partners are able to make sense of their contribution to tackling the 'three obsessions' through the provision of regular visual updates, well known across the partnership as the 'thing of beauty'. This shared commitment and understanding is increasing shared ownership of, and responsibility for, improving outcomes for children.
157. Confidence to use performance information intelligently at an operational level is developing because of this approach, although it is not yet fully embedded. Performance is improving in a sustained way across a range of measures, for example, referral/re-referral rates, children subject to child protection plans and in the reduction in the number of looked after children.
158. The local authority is strengthening the quality assurance framework, and plans are firmly in place to move away from a focus on compliance, now that this is assured, and to further embed the quality of social work practice to ensure consistency and consistently positive outcomes for children across the city. Good management oversight of practice at an operational level is embedded and is helping to further improve the quality of social work practice. This is ensuring that children are provided with the right help at the right time through, for example, operational measures such as regular case supervision, threshold panels, case audits, and strategically through practice improvement meetings.

159. Case file audit tools used routinely by managers have been redesigned to reflect the experiences of children and to help social workers to focus on areas identified for practice improvement, such as the quality of planning. At an operational level, these are not yet used consistently well to draw out key themes for learning for individual social workers, or to inform focus of further learning at a service level. There is a tendency to focus on compliance issues, and there are missed opportunities to reflect fully on what worked well and why, and what needs to happen next to further improve outcomes for children.
160. Clear priorities for children's services are outlined in the Children and Young People's Plan and driven by an active Children's Trust. Priorities are strategically aligned with the overall local authority plan, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Safer Communities Strategy. Cross-cutting priorities and the 'three obsessions' are facilitating a shared ambition for children across the city and providing a sharp focus for strategic and operational thinking. This has been resolutely delivered and is helping to improve the parity between service provision for children and adults' health, well-being, and safety. Equal prioritisation is being given to children and adults within the Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board, which are often adult focused. Both are adopting a 'think family' approach within their strategies and joint commission arrangements.
161. Outcomes for children and young people are improving because help is being provided at an earlier stage, and more children are safely remaining with their families. Young people's life chances are improving through better attendance at school and improved provision of education, employment and training opportunities. These outcomes form the basis of the 'three obsessions', which have become the main focus for improvement across the local authority and partnership.
162. Scrutiny activity and oversight of children's services is impressive, with strong prioritisation and a comprehensive understanding of the needs of children, young people and their families. Robust challenge is achieved through a range of pertinent inquiries and a strong corporate parenting ethos that extends beyond looked after children.
163. Corporate parents, supported by an experienced and committed Lead Member, take a keen interest in looked after children and are well informed about their progress through the corporate parenting board. Success and achievement is celebrated by the authority, and there is good evidence of children's and young people's influence on political decision making, for example, in raising care leavers' entitlements, and improving placement choice for looked after children.

164. The positive impact of effective partnership working is in evidence across a wide range of services. For example: strengthened partnerships at a cluster level now provide locality-based services to meet children and families' needs; private fostering arrangements are enhanced and strengthened; accountability is improved within private children's homes; and school attendance, particularly at primary school level, now exceeds comparators.
165. Governance arrangements are strong within the integrated commissioning framework and there is an appropriate focus on emotional health and well-being, children with complex needs, early help through the 'best start in life' agenda, family support, and transitions into adulthood. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is currently being refreshed to align with the Think Families approach adopted by the partnership.
166. A well-informed commissioning strategy uses a broad range of information to identify the needs of children, young people and families across the city and within the clusters. For example: research undertaken to understand the high number of children looked after under two years old; an audit of the health needs of looked after children; and a thematic case file audit of the prevalence of parental domestic violence, mental ill-health and substance misuse. An online observatory has been established to facilitate sharing multi-agency information, and there is a whole system approach to ensure that children and families effectively influence commissioning arrangements. This approach is leading to the planning and provision of more targeted services in line with children and families' needs locally. For example, the Think Family approach has been embedded within the drug and alcohol strategy, resulting in further services being commissioned for perpetrators of domestic abuse, for substance misuse, and maternity provision.
167. A whole system review is being undertaken to better coordinate services that support children and families' emotional health and well-being, and to make services more accessible to families at a local level. This includes targeted mental health provision being rolled out in schools and ensuring clearer referral pathways. Partnership arrangements between the local authority and voluntary sector have been strengthened, and are leading to improved and appropriately-targeted support for children and families, such as the innovative approach to addressing domestic abuse in partnership with Leeds Rhinos rugby league club.
168. An outcomes based accountability (OBA) approach to monitoring the impact of services for children and families has been implemented, but is not yet fully embedded in planning. Commissioning arrangements are currently focused on compliance, so it is difficult to measure the impact of interventions and achieve consistently good outcomes for children across the city. This is replicated in plans developed for individual children and young people and, now that compliance is assured, the local authority is appropriately currently focused on embedding outcome focused planning.

169. The sufficiency strategy is appropriately aligned with the JSNA and commissioning strategy. The placement needs of looked after children are well understood and met. Sound placement commissioning processes are firmly in place, with Leeds acting as a 'hub' and centre of excellence for a regional purchasing consortium. This has achieved improved placement stability. Many examples were seen of child-focused procurement that 'wrapped around' the needs of the individual child, for example, mother and baby foster placements, the provision of Police and Criminal evidence Act (PACE) beds, emergency foster care provision and placements for young people vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. Transition to adult services is appropriately planned for and a jointly-funded Transitions team is managed from Adult services. This arrangement ensures a timely assessment of young people's needs as adults and the identification of the suitable provision available to them.
170. The local authority has established effective relationships with the Local Family Justice Board and Cafcass and this is ensuring that children and young people benefit from efficient and effective progression through legal proceedings. The Public Law Outline is well understood and embedded, with court timescales currently standing at 26 weeks; the best performance locally. The appointment of a case manager has significantly improved communication and has had a positive impact both in the reduction in Emergency Protection Orders and the improved effectiveness of returning children home to live safely with their parents.
171. Leaders have energised partners, including schools, to share their 'obsession' and passion to improve the attendance and achievements of looked after children, and ensure that outcomes are the best that they can be. In the last 18 months they are beginning to show marked improvement. Head teachers speak with authority about how they are increasingly and effectively challenged and supported to improve outcomes for the children in their school.
172. Positive changes made to virtual school arrangements, and increased capacity for meeting pupils' needs early through the multi-agency cluster arrangements across the city, are helping to drive improvements in all pupils' attendance at school, and in particular the attendance rates of looked after pupils. Current tracking of looked after pupils by the virtual school shows that children in the primary and secondary sectors are making better progress this year.
173. The use of research is well-embedded in strategic planning and service delivery, although there is more to do to ensure that research is consistently well used to inform individual assessments. The local authority is outward facing and invites challenge through sector-led improvement, external audits by academics, and peer review. This learning has been used to focus service direction, including restructuring of the 'front door' and the strengthening of cluster arrangements. Appropriate learning is drawn from Serious Case Reviews locally, though the application of learning from national Serious Case Reviews is less well embedded.

174. The local authority is a regional leader for innovation in many areas, such as court processes and the placement procurement consortium, and this approach has helped to secure substantial funding from the Innovation Council towards transforming the whole children's social care system in the city, implementing a restorative, family-centred model. The strategic partnerships are committed to this approach.
175. The local authority has firmly embedded a culture of learning and improvement in strategic planning and operational thinking. A refreshed workforce strategy strongly focuses on continual professional development and has established clear career pathways for social workers and increased capacity. This has resulted in improved workforce stability and strengthened relationships between social workers, children and their families. For example, there has been:
- a significant fall in the number of agency staff used, from 40 to 26 (August to Nov 2014)
 - improvement in the number of social workers with less than 2 years' experience, from 57% in Nov 2013 to 26% in Nov 2014
 - improved career progression, through the creation of an Advanced Practitioner role and increasing the number of senior social work posts (from 38 in Nov 2013 to 69 in Nov 2014)
 - reduced turnover of staff, from 27% 2013–14 to 13.5% now
 - lower levels of absence; currently 8.28 days are lost per employee, the lowest across all Leeds Council departments.
176. The quality of social work practice is improving, and this has been assisted by a clear offer of continuous professional development at all levels of the organisation, which is linked to the professional capabilities framework. This includes good levels of support for newly qualified social workers in their first year of social work practice, including: action learning sets; academic learning; mentoring; the provision of an aspiring manager's programme and leadership development programmes; and improved support for social workers by senior social workers and advanced practitioners. 'Grow your own' and 'step up to social work' schemes are successfully contributing to workforce stability.
177. Caseloads have reduced from a previously too-high level to an average of between 20 and 25 children, and appropriate prioritisation is being given to further reducing caseloads to between 15 and 20. Social workers say that their workloads are manageable, and this is assisted by joint, co-working of cases and flexibility in workload allocation between teams. The role of Advanced Practitioner is supporting operational demands well. Responsive action is taken to ensure that caseloads remain at an acceptable level, such as creation of an additional team in an area of the city where the referral rate is higher.

178. The comprehensive offer of training for social workers is suitably evaluated by appropriately focusing on its impact on the quality of practice. This is responsive, and effectively links with workforce needs through practice improvement meetings attended by senior managers and representatives from human resources. Social workers and managers spoken to are committed, bright and confident. They feel well supported through management supervision. Some models of supervision seen are innovative and effective, but in many instances casework supervision rather than outcome-focused planning was driving plans for children forward.
179. Appraisals of performance are appropriately focused on whole service objectives based on strategic priorities. Objectives set in the previous year have been concentrated on ensuring compliance, and the accompanying narrative demonstrates the extent to which this has been achieved. However, there is inconsistency in relation to the extent in which individuals reflect on the impact of their practice and training, and what they could do to further develop. Supervision does not consistently evidence reflective practice, and there is limited connection made to personal objectives identified through the annual appraisal system. This reduces the focus on continuous improvement.
180. A strong and embedded culture ensures that children and young people are listened to and are influential in informing service delivery. This is being assisted by the authority-wide vision to ensure that Leeds is a child friendly city with, for example, 300 city-wide ambassadors across the public, private and voluntary sectors signed up to convey this message across the city. Children's contribution to service delivery is consistently elicited through both commissioning and workforce development, with young people being involved in training and recruitment of staff. A notable commitment places children at the heart of any activity, and this is embedded in social work practice.
181. A well-managed complaints service ensures that all complaints are effectively dealt with at the earliest possible stage. Where complaints are escalated, investigations are undertaken by a private provider commissioned to perform this service, and this ensures independence. Generally, learning from complaints is underpinned by a comprehensive Annual Report and is leading to an improvement in services to children. This includes children influencing the direction of both individual cases and service provision.
182. A wide-ranging, accessible advocacy service for looked after children is commissioned from a national charity, and includes the provision of advocacy for children with individual communication needs. This has recently been re-commissioned and formally extended to provide additional services to children with a disability and subject to child protection plans.
183. Children's views of their advocacy needs are integral to the commissioning process, and children are provided with an empathetic service by trained and experienced professionals who are well-attuned to their specific needs.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is good

The arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children are good

Summary of findings

The LSCB is good because:

The LSCB is good because it fulfils all of its statutory responsibilities and capably coordinates the work of all key statutory partners by scrutinising, analysing and improving the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding practice in Leeds.

The Board has effective leadership and has active support from the Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive and Lead Member. The Chair is particularly influential in holding partners to account for their contribution to the safety and protection of children and young people in Leeds, including those children living away from their home area. The Board's leadership has been instrumental in developing a strong support and challenge culture, and this is valued by all senior partners.

Robust performance management and quality assurance arrangements ensure that the Board knows its strengths and its weaknesses. The Board's priorities are carefully derived from the findings of multi-agency audits and other intelligence. The Board's priorities are closely aligned with other key strategic bodies so that it both effectively influences them and holds them to account. The business plan contains detailed actions that can be clearly measured and monitored by the Board.

The Board has been influential through its strong leadership in ensuring a strong focus on child sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care. The Board has also been instrumental in influencing the rebalancing of the statutory children's multi-agency framework to a 'Think Family-Work Family' model, featuring restorative approaches and improvements to the 'Front Door' arrangements.

There is a strong focus on the voice and influence of children and young people through an innovative Student LSCB, which has been operational for over a year.

What does the LSCB need to improve?

Priority and immediate action

There are no priority actions.

Areas for improvement

184. Report on the effectiveness of all key partner agencies, through both performance management datasets in order that all safeguarding activity is measured and evaluated in addition to children's social care.
185. Collate and aggregate intelligence from return interviews of missing children to inform child sexual exploitation intelligence and analysis.
186. Develop improved intelligence and analysis of child sexual exploitation hotspots to inform disruption efforts.
187. Accelerate efforts to both understand and evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding in some harder to reach religious settings and Black and minority ethnic, third and community sector groups engaging with children, with particular awareness of the possibility of radicalisation in some religious and cultural settings.
188. Scrutinise the absence of serious incident notifications from partner agencies to ensure that the criteria are well understood and effectively in operation.

Inspection judgement about the LSCB

189. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is a key member of the group of strategic partnerships in Leeds. The Chair is particularly influential in holding partners to account for their contribution to the safety and protection of children and young people in Leeds, including those children living away from their home area.
190. The LSCB is a fundamental component in developing the corporate objective of a child friendly city. A primary aim of the strategy is an earlier offer of help to children, whilst ensuring that children who require immediate safeguarding are consistently identified. The Board strongly influences the strategic priorities of the Children and Families Trust. Strong partnerships are demonstrated by examples of operational arrangements that are jointly resourced and staffed.

191. The Board is outward facing. Priorities for 2014–15 are wide ranging and derived from the findings of quality assurance activities. The Board has joint funded external research, and this has critically evaluated operational and practice arrangements. Evaluations have appropriately included the 'Front Door' arrangements and children and young people who are subject to repeated child protection plans. External academic evaluations are an integral feature of the Board's impact measurement and improvement tools.
192. The LSCB Annual Report is evaluative and analytical in content rather than descriptive. A continual refrain is how the Board can learn more and increase the effectiveness of its challenge and scrutiny. Key LSCB priorities are reflected in the Children and Families Trust strategic plan, which is currently being refreshed.
193. The Board has been instrumental in influencing the rebalancing of the statutory children's multi-agency framework to a 'Think Family-Work Family' model featuring restorative approaches. Particularly prominent in the model is the extensive use of Family Group Conferences.
194. Board meetings are consistently attended by appropriately senior partner representatives. An executive group meets bi-monthly and this maintains momentum. The Board's sub-groups are supported by Business Unit Managers and have clear work programmes to drive forward their business plans.
195. The Business Plan carefully crafts strategic priorities into an effective action plan. The plan has sufficient flexibility to allow priorities to be re-ordered in accordance with emerging intelligence from quality assurance and audit programmes. Current priorities are well informed and include improving the care leaver service, evaluating the quality of child protection and children in need plans and assessing the quality and consistency of early help assessments and interventions across the 25 clusters.
196. The Board has a measured and effective approach to monitoring and evaluating multi-agency frontline safeguarding practice. The Board exercises careful scrutiny of the transition from a traditional threshold management model to one where referrals receive considered conversations and responses based on the needs of children, rather than establishing whether a threshold has been met.
197. Audits and other quality assurance intelligence are reported in weekly and quarterly performance scorecards, with aggregated findings synthesised in an annual performance report. An evaluative, questioning approach pervades the Board's style, in which the pace of progress is measured then recalibrated in the light of the emergence of new challenges; for example, the better identification of adolescent self-harm, forced marriage and child sexual exploitation.

198. Board partners value the strong challenge and support model manifested in the arrangements of the Board meetings. This features small working groups, where members routinely challenge partners whose statutory responsibilities are different from their own to ensure a comprehensive safeguarding service. For instance, the Board's Police representative was robustly challenged over a recent HMIC report which featured some critical judgements of police safeguarding activities although actions taken to robustly challenge the lack of police, GP and mainstream midwifery attendance at child protection conferences is yet to show any impact.
199. The Board's scrutiny and overview of partners' safeguarding arrangements are careful and thorough. Section 175 returns from schools achieve a 100% completion rate. The Board then establishes common themes, leading for example, to the implementation of improved supervision arrangements for designated safeguarding leads in schools. Section 11 audits also have high completion rates and are subject to a peer challenge process, also identifying salient themes and learning. The Board's budget is secure, comprising annual contribution from partner agencies, which ensures that the Board's priorities can be effectively addressed.
200. A comprehensive Learning and Development Strategy includes local agencies providing core curriculum introductory safeguarding programmes. The Board's Learning and Improvement Framework is developed collaboratively with partner agencies and features regular reviews of the impact of learning on improved practice, multi-agency working and enhanced outcomes for children and young people.
201. A comprehensive and extensive multi-agency training programme is well attended by most partners. The programme is firmly rooted in learning priorities, comprising core safeguarding training and additional specialist courses reflecting learning needs identified from quality assurance and performance analysis. Head teachers spoke positively about the range of high quality LSCB safeguarding training provided for schools and all social workers spoken to had recently attended an LSCB course.
202. The Board recognises the difficulty in demonstrating a linear relationship between training and development inputs and improved outcomes for children. It therefore purposefully evaluates the impact of its training programmes through Section 11 returns, partner agency reports to the Board and effectiveness evaluations at three months after training. A variety of mechanisms are deployed to disseminate learning in addition to structured courses, including 'light bites', 'one minuteguides' (OMG's) and regular e-bulletins. Practitioner surveys report favourably on the availability and content of training and learning opportunities.

203. There have been no Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) initiated in 2014–15, but there have been three Learning Lesson Reviews (LLRs). The Child 'Y' SCR, initiated in 2013, was published at the end of January 2015. Lessons from LLRs are effectively pinpointed and incorporated into both the Learning and Development cycle and the performance management dataset to ensure that lessons are learned. This has included a review of the Leaving Care Service and developing a more cohesive partnership approach to adolescent self-harming and suicidal presentations. Child 'Y' and Child 'V' SCRs have successfully informed learning and development activities concerning chronic neglect and better identification of adolescents with significant emotional difficulties, particularly in the two secure institutions located within Leeds.
204. The Board has identified with some concern the lack of any serious incident notifications from major partner agencies in the last year. The decision making process about whether or not to initiate an SCR is reported as robust. However, the fact that the SCR sub-group has not received any serious incident notifications over the last year requires further scrutiny.
205. The West Yorkshire Consortium ensures that core LSCB Policies and Procedures are in place across the five member authorities. These are methodically and promptly updated as new regulation and guidance emerges. The LSCB website contains clear, accessible links to the electronic procedures. The LSCB website is an accessible and navigable tool through which multi-agency practitioners can readily access safeguarding procedures.
206. The Board has been a strong influence in the remodelling of the children's system to one where more help is offered earlier across the 25 clusters, underpinned by comprehensive policies, procedures and quality assurance initiatives to ensure that children who require a statutory safeguarding response are identified quickly. Board partners, particularly schools (who are the biggest referrers), describe a discernible culture change from rigid threshold discussions with the front door, to one in which productive conversations are held, with growing confidence that the early help offer in clusters is providing reliable, robust and appropriate alternatives based on need and risk.
207. The Board recognises that further work needs to be undertaken to influence the achievement of consistently effective management of referrals and high quality assessments across all the clusters. Careful monitoring identifies that some clusters are developing effective practices more quickly than others. The Board has plans to closely monitor standards and outcomes over the next year to identify, support and challenge any clusters that are lagging behind.

208. The Child Death and Overview Panel's (CDOP) annual report to the Board reveals a substantial decline in all child deaths including accidental deaths over the last six years. The CDOP has focused particularly on reducing child deaths in the most deprived areas of the city, to narrow the gap with more affluent districts using evidence-based public health approaches. CDOP has reviewed 83% of child deaths, which is consistent with the national average. Action Plans resulting from child deaths are reviewed quarterly to ensure that prevention campaigns and targeted public health campaigns are effective.
209. There are good links with the Health and Wellbeing Board (H&WB), particularly a 'read across' to the 'Best Start' Programme to instil safer parenting behaviours, especially over the dangers of co-sleeping and smoking with infants. Children's public health priorities feature in H&WB plans. The LSCB recognises, however, that more effective commissioning of services needs to gather pace in these areas.
210. The Board has closely charted the increase of new child sexual exploitation cases identified over the last two years. The CSE sub-group was set up in 2012 and has improved multi-agency responses at strategic and operational levels through an effective, multi-layered strategy and action plan. The LSCB website houses clear referral pathways for the multi-agency management of risk and assessment. Vulnerability and Risk Management meetings are held to develop multi-agency safeguarding plans for young people assessed as medium and higher risk. A coordinator has been recruited by the council, and a suitable plan is firmly in place to build consistent, robust operational responses across the partnership by developing both a multi-agency hub and a multi-agency team in 2015 to improve intelligence collation and analysis.
211. The CSE and the Missing sub-groups have combined in recognition of the overlapping risks to young people. Missing episodes evaluated by inspectors indicate that the majority are effectively managed and return interviews routinely held. The Board reported an increase of missing incidents in 2013–14. However, there is no performance data which captures statutory children's services completion rates and the intelligence gathered from return home interviews, and this diminishes the sub-group's capacity to identify both patterns and hotspots and to target disruption activity. The CSE and Missing Sub-group has identified young people at high and medium risk, but acknowledges that further work is required to respond better to young people at the lower end of the risk spectrum.
212. Frontline practice is effectively evaluated, primarily through ongoing programmes of multi-agency audits. These are well targeted at areas requiring improvement that have been identified through the performance reporting cycle. Careful feedback of audits to staff entails findings being incorporated into additional courses in the Learning and Development Offer.

213. Performance management scrutiny and evaluation is exercised through quarterly and annual reporting. The content is predominantly drawn from children's social care. There are emerging efforts to develop further multi-agency performance data sets, but these are in their infancy. A specialist post has been recruited to further develop reporting of multi-agency quantitative and qualitative data in 2015. However, partner agency data is considered and understanding the story beneath the data is a prominent feature of the performance sub-group. For example, Accident and Emergency admission data has recently been evaluated by Health representatives to examine trends and responses concerning young people presenting with self-harm or suicidal episodes.
214. The Board demonstrates a strong and decisive influence in the planning of services for children, primarily through the intelligence analysed from its audits and performance management reporting. For example, there is a comprehensive range of targeted and universal approaches for families affected by domestic abuse. Repeat referrals have reduced by 20% whilst notifications have increased, indicating effective interventions and awareness raising programmes. There has been an unusually high spike in the number of domestic homicides in Leeds. Ten reviews (initiated between April 2012 and July 2014) are currently ongoing. It was reported that only two of the ten households had children living in the families concerned, and in both of these the children had been removed before the murders were committed.
215. An innovative Student LSCB, with membership drawn from the student body of Leeds, has been operational for over a year. It exercises both a strong influence upon and effective scrutiny of the main Board. For example, the Student LSCB has decisively informed service development in an effective awareness campaign for young people about on-line grooming, and in facilitating more accessible complaints procedures for young people. The Student LSCB is encouraging all partner agencies to develop a young people's advisory group to increase the voice of young people in their agency's plans and priorities.

What the inspection judgements mean

The local authority

An **outstanding** local authority leads highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** local authority leads effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and those who are looked after and care leavers have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a local authority that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the authority is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children, young people and families.

A local authority that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after or care leavers not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

The LSCB

An **outstanding** LSCB is highly influential in improving the care and protection of children. Their evaluation of performance is exceptional and helps the local authority and its partners to understand the difference that services make and where they need to improve. The LSCB creates and fosters an effective learning culture.

An LSCB that is **good** coordinates the activity of statutory partners and monitors the effectiveness of local arrangements. Multi-agency training in the protection and care of children is effective and evaluated regularly for impact. The LSCB provides robust and rigorous evaluation and analysis of local performance that identifies areas for improvement and influences the planning and delivery of high-quality services.

An LSCB **requires improvement** if it does not yet demonstrate the characteristics of good.

An LSCB that is **inadequate** does not demonstrate that it has effective arrangements in place and the required skills to discharge its statutory functions. It does not understand the experiences of children and young people locally and fails to identify where improvements can be made.

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 adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff works 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 who 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 nine of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors (AI) from Ofsted.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Tracey Metcalfe

Deputy lead inspector: Sarah Urding

Team inspectors: Brendan Parkinson, Anji Parker, Ty Yousaf (AI), Dick O'Brien, Margaret Farrow, Nick Stacey (AI) and Ian Young

Quality assurance manager: Paul Armitage

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Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD
T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk
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