

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

North Yorkshire County Council

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Contents

About this inspection	2
The inspecton judgements and what they mean	2
Service information	3
The inspection outcomes: safeguarding services	3
1. Overall effectiveness	3
2. Capacity for improvement	4
3. Areas for improvement	4
4. Outcomes for children and young people	5
a. The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure children and young people are safe	5
b. The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe	6
5. The quality of provision	7
6. Leadership and management	8
The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children	11
1. Overall effectiveness	11
2. Capacity for improvement	11
3. Areas for improvement	11
4. Outcomes for children and young people	12
5. The quality of provision	13
6. Leadership and management	14
Record of main findings	17

About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two inspectors from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with 32 children and young people and 31 parent/carers receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision, and the evaluations of serious case reviews undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together To Safeguard Children' 2006.
 - a review of 20 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres undertaken on 30 June and 1 July 2009.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements
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Service information

4. North Yorkshire has around 138,500 children and young people under the age of 19 years. This is 23% of the total population in the county. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below the national average. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 2.7% of the total population. There is a small Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population. In January 2008, the proportion of pupils in North Yorkshire with English as an additional language was 2% (primary) and 1.8% (secondary).

5. The North Yorkshire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership was formally set up in March 2006 and was renamed as the North Yorkshire Children's Trust in 2009. The Trust includes North Yorkshire County Council, the North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust (NYYPCT), North Yorkshire Police Authority, schools, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), voluntary and community sectors and representation from both children and young people and parents. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) brings together the main organisations that work with children and families in North Yorkshire, including the County Council, the NYYPCT and North Yorkshire Police and has direct representation on the Children's Trust Board.

6. Social care services for children have 312 foster carer households, three children's homes, three children's resource centres for disabled children, two family centres and 15 locality based teams.

7. At the time of inspection there were 442 looked after children. North Yorkshire has established a Virtual School for Looked After Children. This comprises an integrated team of education, social care and health staff with a remit to provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to supporting looked after children in all areas of their lives.

8. North Yorkshire has three nurseries, 325 primary, 47 secondary and 11 special schools, providing places to over 84,000 school aged children and young people. There are two pupil referral units, three hospital teaching units and 30 operational Children's Centres. Extended services clusters are established across the county providing locally based services to support families.

9. NHS North Yorkshire and York is the lead commissioner for community health services, and the Harrogate Foundation Trust and Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Trust are the main providers of acute hospital care for children in the area. In addition, South Tees NHS Hospitals Trust, Airedale NHS Trust and Bradford District Care Trust provide acute hospital services for residents in North Yorkshire. Mental health services are provided by the North

Yorkshire and York Community and Mental Health Service and the Tees Esk & Wear Valley Foundation NHS Trust.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (Adequate)

10. The overall effectiveness of the safeguarding services in North Yorkshire is adequate. The LSCB is moving forward on a range of key areas of work across the broad safeguarding agenda and this is leading to improved outcomes for children, such as children feeling safer in their communities than they did before. More recently, strengthened multi-agency representation has ensured the work of the Board is supported well through an appropriate range of sub groups. Joint working between the LSCB and the Children's Trust has effectively produced a shared vision and agreed priorities for improvement. Joint policies and procedures for the protection of children are comprehensive and up to date. The lessons learned from three serious case reviews have been implemented effectively. However the Children's Trust and the LSCB do not provide sufficient independent challenge across the sector and this has only recently begun to be addressed by the appointment of an independent chair person of the LSCB. The Trust is listening to the views of users to help contribute to service plans and this is leading to good levels of user satisfaction. Partnership with the private, voluntary and community sector provides responses which meet local needs well, and agencies use the *Common Assessment Framework* (CAF) increasingly effectively. However, the reason for the recent increase in numbers of children with a child protection plan and those who are placed on a plan for a second time within nine months is not known. Workforce planning has effectively secured skilled, capable and knowledgeable staff but their deployment is not always closely aligned to demand. The unannounced inspection identified areas for development regarding the quality and timeliness of assessments and two areas for priority action where child protection procedures had not been followed, cases had not been allocated, and whether there were delays responding to others. The local authority children's services have been quick to respond and address these areas but action planning and the audit trail demonstrating management oversight and challenge across the partnership are not clear. The timeliness and quality of child protection responses remain variable and include examples of poor communication and slow responses following referrals. Management oversight and decision making, although improving, are not always evident on case files.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (Adequate)

11. The capacity for improvement is adequate. The political and managerial leadership across the local area partnership provides a good impetus for change, structures are well established and there is a strong commitment

shown by partners to the safeguarding agenda. Managers have a good track record of achieving improvement over time, demonstrated through the Children and Young People's Plan. There are some areas where the capacity to improve is good, such as the commissioning arrangements and the contribution made by the third sector, however the capacity to improve the local authority children's services core business for the delivery of child protection services is only adequate. Improvements have been made since the joint area review (JAR) in 2006 when services were judged to be adequate for staying safe but these improvements have not been sustained, for example in the timeliness of initial and core assessments. Although the reasons for poor performance have changed, the areas where performance is of concern remain. Demand for assessment and safeguarding services has increased following national trends and managers have responded well by developing a range of appropriate strategic improvement plans to safeguard children. Although additional resources have been identified by the county council, significant workload pressures remain and these are exacerbated by poor progress on the implementation of the information technology system that supports the Integrated Children's System (ICS). The geographical size and rurality of the county compound these difficulties further. The combined factors are having a serious impact on performance and on the direct contact time professionals spend with children and families. This has also led to an overspend in the children's services budget. There are good systems in place to monitor and evaluate performance, however the response of senior managers to tackle the priority areas for action identified at the unannounced inspection is not subject to a specific robust action plan and it is not clear if progress on all aspects of the inspection findings are being monitored effectively.

Areas for improvement

12. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in North Yorkshire, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- Produce a service specific, detailed action plan which sets out how children's services are tackling the areas for development and priority action reported at the unannounced inspection and ensure the plan is agreed and owned by elected members, the Children's Trust and the LSCB and is closely monitored by the partnership.
- Utilise the combined resources of the council and its partners to prioritise and address the difficulties associated with the ICS.

Within three months:

- Undertake a full evaluation of current children's services actual spending to reconcile the need for increased safeguarding services against the current overspend and to ensure strong financial planning that sustains the service operation over the medium and long term.
- Improve consistency in the quality and timeliness of assessments and child protection investigations.

Within six months:

- Conduct further analysis to explore why the number of children subject to a child protection plan for more than two years has increased and also why the number of those children who are placed on a plan for a second time within nine months is high.

Outcomes for children and young people**The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade 3 (Adequate)**

13. The effectiveness of services in North Yorkshire to ensure that children and young people are safe is adequate. There has been a reduction of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents. Children are more confident in reporting incidents of bullying in schools. Procedures and practice to support this have led to a reduction in the number of children being bullied. All schools adopt safe practices which have a positive impact on the safety of children and measures taken to track missing children is effective. All regulated provision except private fostering is judged good or better in their staying safe arrangements. Staff recruitment and vetting processes across all partner agencies accord with current guidance and regulation and arrangements are robust. The LSCB effectively disseminates learning and research from serious case reviews, including holding multi-agency training events which are well attended across the partnership. In the main, there is effective cooperation between agencies to assess the needs and risks to ensure children are protected.

14. In front line children's social care services for the most vulnerable children, there were delays seen in the completion of some assessments and child protection (Section 47) enquiries. There are some examples of inconsistent practice in the use of child protection procedures. Some health care staff reported that referrals are not acted on promptly or confirmed in writing, leading them to question whether both agencies had the same understanding of the child protection threshold. These aspects combined could potentially result in some children and young people not receiving services or not being safeguarded effectively in a timely manner. Once children enter the

child protection system, cases are allocated to a suitably qualified social worker and all child protection reviews are held on time. More children are being protected with evidence of an increase in numbers of children subject to a child protection plan and in court proceedings.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade 2 (Good)

15. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people feel safe is good. A wide range of initiatives are in place to ensure children feel safe. There are examples of effective strategies to promote good behaviour in schools through the Healthy Schools initiative and the Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning programme. Practice in schools is particularly strong in tackling aspects of equality and discrimination. Hate crime and bullying are being tackled effectively. A high proportion of children who responded to the School Health and Related Behaviour Questionnaire said they feel safe in their communities. The police make an effective contribution to reducing anti-social behaviour. They also work well with vulnerable families, particularly those where domestic violence and substance misuse might have an impact on children's safety. Although a growing area of work, it is a mark of the success of the multi-agency response that more families are engaging with support services. The surveys undertaken by the Children's Trust to inform service planning are comprehensive and have a high response rate. The contribution of service users leading to service improvements is well documented. Social work practice is good in this area. Children are always seen as part of assessments, their views are recorded and account is taken of their age and understanding. Copies of assessments are routinely sent to the parents and, where appropriate, to the child. Practice and procedures for the involvement of children and young people in child protection conferences are good. Children and families involved in the CAF, and others on a child protection plan who spoke directly with inspectors, stated that the process had been helpful to them and suitably inclusive.

The quality of provision Grade 3 (Adequate)

16. The quality of safeguarding services is adequate.

17. Service responsiveness including dealing with complaints is adequate. There is good multi-agency involvement in front line work although the capacity of health visitors to respond to safeguarding and welfare needs of children and families is limited. The use of the CAF and preventative services are having a positive impact on children's lives. Partnership working to safeguard children, such as responses to support families experiencing domestic abuse, is increasingly effective. Children and young people have access to a satisfactory complaints procedure and this is supported by a good, independent advocacy service. All front line social work practitioners report significant problems caused by the ICS. This is having a discernable impact on their ability to keep adequate records of their work and deliver assessments within timescales. This

also reduces the time they have to undertake direct work with families. Although the work of the LSCB is adequate and improving and there is a strong focus on learning from serious case reviews, analysis of the impact of issues relating to child deaths and serious incidents is insufficient. Also there are delays in completing a multi-agency management review being conducted outside the serious case review process.

18. Arrangements for the assessment of, and direct work with, families are adequate. The approach to the delivery of the CAF is impressive with good quality family-focused assessments. Thresholds, based on cases sampled, are clear and communicated well to service users and partner agencies, but health visitors report some inconsistencies in how their referrals are dealt with by children's services. There is evidence of learning, development and improvements in the work being carried out across the range of agencies. Good multi-agency work provides additional support to more vulnerable families, reducing the risks to children and the need for them to be on a child protection plan. The out-of-hours service works effectively. The LSCB child protection procedures provide a sound basis for child protection work. There is good, well co-ordinated work to support families who have experienced domestic violence and to deal with the impact on children and families. Procedures and practice to track all children missing from education are good. Good multi-agency arrangements exist for the delivery of restorative justice which is contributing to improvements in reducing youth crime. Performance on the completion of initial and core assessments within national timescales is inconsistent across the county and worse than similar authorities and the national average. A low number of core assessments is completed compared to the national picture. Delays were seen in the completion of some child protection (Section 47) enquiries. This could have resulted in some children and young people not receiving services or not being safeguarded effectively in a timely manner. Managers have taken swift action following the unannounced inspection to tackle the areas for priority action and all child protection cases are allocated. However the use of agency staff has resulted in some children experiencing a number of changes in their social worker.

19. Procedures and practice for case planning, review and recording are inadequate. Planning, reviews and recording of cases seen by inspectors are at least adequate and in some cases are good. However the quality and timeliness of some assessments are poor. All child protection conferences and reviews are appropriately managed by a suitably qualified and trained independent reviewing officer (IRO). Strategy meetings are used well to inform planning, with a strong focus on improving outcomes for the child. The council has yet to analyse why the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan for more than two years has increased and also why the number of those children who are placed again on a plan within nine months is high. Serious failures in the ICS system have resulted in social workers experiencing work pressures that have reduced the quality and timelines of their responses, potentially leaving children at risk. This has reduced this judgement area to inadequate. This is a critical issue for the council which is having a profound impact on children's

social care and has resulted in a deterioration in performance against national indicators since the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment. The council is addressing the problem and the ICS is the subject of a comprehensive recovery plan. However this has not yet had sufficient impact.

Leadership and management

Grade 3 (Adequate)

20. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are adequate overall with some strong features.

21. Ambition and prioritisation are good. There is extensive, ambitious and realistic target setting in relation to safeguarding set out in the Children and Young People's Plan. There are good plans for safeguarding services including local area agreements. The Children's Trust provides clear, visible leadership to safeguard and promote the welfare of children across services. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, is informed by a detailed needs analysis. All key partners, including the voluntary and community sectors, are engaged but more work is needed to improve the coordination of safeguarding across the area such as improving services for children who are in private foster placements. The work of the partnership is being driven forward appropriately. In the main, leadership is responsive, proactive and effective. Resource deficits are known, understood and risk assessed to determine priorities for action and the council has shifted resources to tackle key issues such as an increase in the capacity of social work practitioners in response to the increase in demand for safeguarding services.

22. Aspects of evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development, are adequate. The arrangements for the evaluation of performance and financial management are well embedded across the partnership. Although officers are working hard to overcome the difficulties associated with ICS, the quality of performance management data is not sufficiently robust and wasteful parallel systems have had to be established to ensure the integrity of data. Adequate use is made of multi-agency auditing of service pressure points to improve safeguarding services and this is informing detailed plans for the improvement of the service. The partnership's progress against its targets is variable. Some targets have been exceeded but progress is slow or there has not yet been an impact in others. Workforce planning has ensured that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced social workers in place alongside other staff to deliver service priorities. Training is a strong feature. Processes to ensure safe recruitment meet the statutory minimum requirements are in place. The recent reorganisation of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) identified that the arrangements for assurance of compliance with Core Standard 2 for safeguarding were not sufficient in 2008/09. At the time of the inspection, good progress has been made and systems are now in place but not yet validated. Good arrangements are in place for the commissioning of children's services. Overall, staff express confidence in leaders and managers. Although respondents to the social work survey identified they

are well supported by their managers and they receive a good level of supervision, some workers were not able to access the training due to work pressures.

23. Service engagement with users is good. The Children's Trust Board membership is appropriate and includes a good range of cross-sector representation including children and parent carers. There is evidence throughout the Children and Young People's Plan of the contribution made by children and young people, and their parents and carers, in the planning processes and this is leading to improvements in services and outcomes such as shaping services in communities to closely meet local need. Practice for the inclusion of children and young people in child protection and targeted safeguarding services are good. They contribute effectively at child protection conferences and parents' contributions are actively encouraged in case reviews. There is a well established complaints and representations process and the children and parents who spoke with inspectors reported a consistently high level of satisfaction with the quality of this service. Good arrangements are in place to provide advocacy for children and young people. This includes support around bullying, discrimination and for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

24. Partnership working is adequate. The LSCB and Children's Trust fulfil their statutory duties and provide effective community and professional leadership in relation to universal, targeted and specialist safeguarding services. The LSCB demonstrates adequate levels of influence across all areas where the safety and welfare of children and young people need to be considered. However the independent challenge to partner agencies has been insufficiently robust and activities have been too often led by children's services. This has only recently begun to be addressed through the appointment of an independent chair person. Serious case reviews undertaken by the LSCB have been judged adequate and the lessons learned from these have been effectively implemented. The planned implementation of integrated services is particularly effective, providing sharply focused solutions to meet local needs and the PCT is a key player in this success. The council's arrangements for monitoring commissioned services are good. They are in line with local policy and procedure and ensure that the delivery of services meet the prescribed quality standards.

25. Equality and diversity arrangements are adequate. The county council's commitment to equality in the Children and Young People's Plan is good. The vision is comprehensive, ensuring adequate levels of access. The council achieved Level 2 in the Equality Standard and was working towards Level 3 before the performance measure changed. Managers report that the council's position has improved as strategies are beginning to show impact but this has not yet been verified. The roll out of integrated services is helping to deliver services which are more closely aligned to meet the needs of the diverse communities across the county. However, access to parent support advisors, children's centres and health visitors is not equitable across county. There are

good examples of effective inclusion for parents in Selby, at the Catterick Garrison and the Ryedale special families group which helps support parents of children and young people with learning difficulty and/or disability in the area. Staff interviewed as part of the inspection report that the council ensures the equality of opportunity between staff. The needs and planning of services for vulnerable groups have been the subject of a thorough needs analysis. However, some staff who spoke with inspectors were not aware of how the needs of vulnerable groups are identified within the wide range of groups, for instance migrant workers and the Black ethnic minorities.

26. Value for money is adequate. The Children's Trust and the LSCB actively consider how safeguarding and child protection objectives can be achieved effectively, efficiently and economically. However this work is hindered by limited analysis of some specific local community-based family support projects and difficulties with the ICS. There are good systems in place to evaluate value for money. They are embedded across the partnership and there are examples where corrective action has been taken to tackle overspend and of creative action to reallocate money from one service to another in order to focus on priorities and make efficiency savings. The managers responsible for the financial management of their respective services know and understand the constraints of their budgets. At the time of the inspection, the children's services budget was operating with a considerable overspend. Although primarily the result of engaging agency staff and responding to the ICS problems, this is not a sustainable position for the council. Clear processes are established for the scrutiny of financial spend with all areas subject to at least quarterly monitoring and a strong focus on unit costs and scrutiny by members. The PCT and the local authority are both taking action to tackle key areas of overspend, which are the subject of continual assessment.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2 (Good)

27. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children and young people are good. The Children and Young People's Plan shows that partners are working together to meet targets and develop new services to meet changing needs. The majority of services are of a high quality. The strong commitment of leaders and managers underpins the very strong child and young person centred approach to service delivery and the determination to improve outcomes for looked after children. However, the work of the corporate parenting group was suspended for a short period and the new group has only been active since January 2009. This has limited the level of engagement by elected members and their potential to further improve outcomes for looked after children. Contracting and monitoring arrangements for commissioned services are good, with a strong focus on outcomes for children. The PCT does

not have a specific overarching strategy for the health needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers. Joint commissioning by the council and the PCT is taking place but the current commissioned service for children's physical health responds only to statutory requirements. The looked after children strategy sets out the clear expectation that most children should not spend their childhood in care. This is being realised by enabling looked after children to return safely to birth families or live with families through adoption, residence orders or special guardianship arrangements.

28. Resources are managed effectively and imaginatively to meet the changing needs of children and families. Some efficiency savings have been made and monies redirected and invested in good outreach programmes for children on the edge of care and intensive support programmes for families involved in anti-social behaviour. In addition, there is strong performance management and benchmarking activity to aggregate, compare and challenge performance for the looked after population as a whole. Outcomes for looked after children demonstrate that the council and its partners are providing high quality education and care for looked after children. The PCT has been prevented by financial constraints from providing more than the basic statutory health requirements for looked after children, but there is a clear commitment to improve this level of service. However, more work is needed to ensure that the transition to adult services for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is sufficient and appropriate.

29. The views of looked after children are well represented through the North Yorkshire Young People's Council where they are collated and analysed. The Council, which is independently chaired, is supported by four locality groups of children who elect representatives to the Council and support the Council's work. The Council has excellent links with strategic groups such as the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership, the Corporate Parenting Standing Group and the Children's Trust Board, ensuring that the voice of children is heard, and routinely informs strategic planning. All reviews for looked after children are held within timescales and this provides an effective mechanism to monitor the continued relevance of the services provided. Overall services are appropriately responsive to the needs of service user. Information from representations and complaints gathered by all three services is aggregated and presented to strategic groups by the children's rights officer who is meticulous in ensuring that lessons are learned and services improved as a result.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

30. The council and its partners have good capacity to improve. The political and managerial leadership across the council demonstrate good ambition and impetus for change. The effectiveness of a wide range of programmes to prevent children entering into care, the quality of looked after services, and the

impact of strategies to minimise children's need to remain in the care system are leading to improved outcomes for children. The number of children placed out of the council area in specialist placements has reduced in recent years as the council has invested in and developed more resources locally. Monitoring arrangements for commissioned placements are rigorous with performance measures linked closely to the providers' ability to demonstrate improved outcomes for looked after children and young people. The treatment foster care programme, specialist fostering schemes and high quality residential provision have enabled many North Yorkshire children to receive the care they need nearer to home, where social work support and monitoring are easier, school placements can be maintained and contact arrangements can be supported. There is evidence of some outstanding practice and extremely dedicated and committed practitioners working well in partnership at all levels. The support and challenge provided by the Educating Looked After Children (ELAC) virtual school to the designated looked after children teachers and schools are good and the inclusion service is outstanding. Strategies to improve educational outcomes for looked after children and young people are being used effectively. The educational attainment of looked after children is good when compared to looked after children in similar authorities and nationally; the gaps between the educational attainment of looked after children and all children in North Yorkshire are beginning to narrow. A needs assessment and review of transition arrangements for all young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those who are looked after, have recently been undertaken but this is not yet having an impact.

Areas for improvement

31. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in North Yorkshire, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Within three months:

- Develop policy, procedure and practice to ensure effective arrangements are in place to support the transition to adult services for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Improve the effectiveness of elected members in their role as corporate parents to support the improvement of outcomes for looked after children.
- Develop a joint strategy between the county council and the PCT for the delivery of physical, general and mental health services for looked after children.

Outcomes for children and young people

32. Services to promote good health among children in care are adequate.

33. The PCT does not have a specific overarching strategy for the health needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers. This has hampered improvement in outcomes for physical, health and emotional well being. Health professionals report that requests for health assessments from social workers are often late. Nevertheless the proportion of health assessments completed is adequate, with assessments being of good quality and carried out in a timely manner. Innovative ways to encourage looked after children and care leavers to take part in health assessments are being developed but at present there is limited provision for care leavers and looked after young people aged 16 to 18. Some targeted health promotion services in relation to sexual health are in place in the council's residential units, but there is scope to extend this work to cover a larger range of topics and for children and young people in foster care. Joint commissioning for mental health provision is in place between the council and the PCT and all children are treated in accordance with their individual identified needs. However, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is not delivered in a consistent and equitable way across the council area. The local tier 4 provision is not in a secure setting so looked after children and young people who are at risk of self harm or of harming others are cared for through spot purchasing of placements outside the council's area.

34. Safeguarding arrangements for looked after children and young people are good. Children and young people who need to be in care are appropriately identified and action taken. Effective and innovative family support services for children on the edge of care enable many to remain in the community with their families. There are good arrangements for monitoring the safety and care of children in placements, both within and outside the council's area. Looked after children enjoy good rates of stability in both short and long term placements. Children's care planning and review meetings are well attended by relevant agencies ensuring that progress continues to be made on outcomes and the contribution of agencies is monitored and challenged. In 2008/9, all looked after children's cases were reviewed within timescales. The council is a pilot for the DCSF *Staying Put* scheme enabling young people in foster care to remain in their foster homes beyond the age 18, if both young person and carer wish this to happen. There is a good range of placements overall to meet children's needs, both within and outside the council area. Regulatory inspections of services for looked after children have all been rated at least good for the Staying Safe outcome. The geography of North Yorkshire means that the most appropriate placement for a child may be some distance away from their home community, however effective planning ensures contact and school arrangements are maintained wherever possible. Techniques such as therapeutic crisis intervention and restorative practice are effective in helping to keep children safe in council placements.

35. The impact of services enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good. The attendance of looked after children at school is good when compared to similar authorities and national benchmarks for this

group (2007/08). Nevertheless the virtual education team has identified that the attendance rate, whilst remaining strong, has declined over the last two years and appropriate strategies are being developed to halt this decline. Schools' performance in behaviour management is good and this is leading to a low rate of permanent and fixed term exclusions which continue to reduce. Although the Local Area Agreement targets for looked after children at age 11 have been missed, robust analysis of the 2009 Key Stage 2 results indicates that attainment has increased compared to the previous year. Gaps in performance have been narrowed and children are generally making similar progress to their peers, taking into account their starting points, average point scores and individual ability. Similarly, educational outcomes at age 16 are good overall. The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with five or more GCSEs at A* – C grade or GNVQ equivalent was above similar authorities and nationally in 2007/08 and improved further in 2008/09, resulting in the council's best ever performance against this measure. There has been a significant improvement in the number of looked after children and young people who have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place. A large majority (95.7%) of looked after children who were of an eligible age have a PEP. The quality of the sample of PEPs seen was generally good. Children's and young people's views were gained through the use of age/ability sensitive approaches and were well represented in the plans. Monitoring and support arrangements for looked after children and care leavers educated outside the area are robust; their achievements are generally in line with their peers educated within North Yorkshire. Looked after children and care leavers report that they have access to good leisure activities of their choice and ELAC team practitioners use funding streams creatively to minimise barriers to participation.

36. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are good. The council and locality groups have delivered programmes which enabled children and care leavers to develop effective communication and influencing and business planning skills. The Young People's Council has successfully engaged looked after children to develop a pledge for children in care. All relevant agencies have committed to support this and effective action planning ensures good progress is being made to improve services for looked after children. Members of the Council are actively involved in training, recruitment, evaluation and quality assurance activities and this is starting to improve service provision. The number of looked after children and young people participating in their statutory reviews has improved and is very good. The independent reviewing officer service, the children's rights officer and the independent advocacy service all help and support children to articulate their wishes and feelings clearly. Four care leavers are undertaking a year's apprenticeship employed by North Yorkshire County Council to facilitate the participation and contribution of looked after children across the area. Performance on the number of looked after children given final warnings, reprimands or convictions is at an acceptable level and there is good multi-agency engagement in the youth justice agenda.

37. The impact of services in enabling looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being is adequate. The care leavers who spoke with inspectors were unhappy about the range, choice and quality of accommodation available for them in diverse and different locations across the county. To address this problem, the council has drawn up a new accommodation strategy for care leavers with its partners. This is being progressed vigorously and is leading to some very good work in partnership with district councils and voluntary and private sector providers to achieve a better range of accommodation options, but it is too early to measure impact. Looked after young people have access to satisfactory advice and guidance on the 14-19 provision. Through the *Staying put* pilot, the council is able to support young people to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21 which improves care leavers' opportunities to progress in education, employment and training. Financial assistance arrangements for care leavers have been reviewed but inspectors were told by young people that information and advice about entitlements were not always easily available. Transition planning is satisfactory, however some young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their carers remain concerned about the future and are unclear about the arrangements for them when they transfer to adult services. All care leavers have a personal advisor. The proportion of eligible young people with a pathway plan is in line with national benchmarks. Pathway plans sampled were thorough and detailed and there were good levels of active participation in the process. The council has made good progress in engaging young people in education, employment and training and performs well when measured against national benchmarks. Tracking and review of progression routes are robust. For example, 22 out of 39 young people leaving Year 11 in 2009 have progressed into further education, six have remained in their special schools, and only four are currently not in education, employment or training. These young people are being offered information advice and guidance through 'employability' and 'leaving care' personal advisors.

The quality of provision

Grade 2 (Good)

38. The quality of looked after service provision is good.

39. Service responsiveness is good. There are very strong arrangements in place to commission high quality placements and services for looked after children which result in improved outcomes such as the stability of placements. The Children's Complaints Manager provides a good focus on helping children to make representations and complaints and there are good links with the independent advocacy service to ensure that children's concerns are dealt with appropriately and quickly and resolved at local level wherever possible. Children and young people who spoke with an inspector had a good knowledge of how to make their concerns known and could identify a trusted adult to help them. There is evidence that concerns are taken seriously and followed up and this is improving the quality of services. The statutory guidelines in relation to complaints against staff working with children are followed and the local authority designated officer (LADO) service is working effectively.

40. Assessments and direct work with children are good. Decisions and actions in relation to the need to be looked after are taken in a timely way and there is good management oversight of these decisions at an appropriately senior level. Most children and young people have sustained relationships with professionals who know them well and care about them. They gave an account of very good relationships with foster carers, residential staff and the dedicated looked after children social workers; family support workers were highly valued by younger children with whom they undertake life story work. However, some young people told inspectors that they had had too many changes of social worker or personal advisor and that the changes had not been conveyed to them quickly and clearly.

41. Support to those on the edge of care is good, with a range of universal and specialist services available and good evidence that unnecessary admissions to care have been prevented in the context of a clear process for assessing risk and decision making. Assessments routinely include the views of children and parents but the quality of assessment work being done is not always reflected in the file record.

42. The arrangements for case planning and review are adequate. Plans for looked after children and care leavers are generally comprehensive, usually implemented in a timely way, and are routinely monitored, evaluated and reviewed by the IRO's. The IRO service for looked after children is very strong providing an effective safeguarding mechanism through high quality challenge to operational staff and effective quality assurance. All plans for looked after children are reviewed within timescales. The council's strategy to limit the need for children to spend most of their childhood in care is working effectively through the promotion of strong arrangements for special guardianship orders and use of kinship care placements. Respite arrangements, and other support services, are given to placements at risk of disruption and, where this does occur, meetings are held to understand what has gone wrong. Records seen were not always up to date. The ICS system was found to be time consuming, does not facilitate evaluative recording practice and does not provide an easily accessible holistic picture of children. The quality of recording was inconsistent across the cases seen. Some plans did not reflect comprehensive and up to date assessments of children, although appropriate decision making was usually evident. File auditing mechanisms are in place but the necessary improvements were not always implemented in a timely way.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

43. Leadership and management of services for looked after children and young people are good.

44. Ambition and prioritisation are good. Strategies and priorities are identified appropriately; there is a clear understanding of gaps in provision and actions are in place or being developed to tackle these. Services are closely matched to meet the individual needs of children, appropriately balancing cost and quality.

Council officers, partners and practitioners take their corporate parenting responsibility very seriously. However, the work of the corporate parenting group was suspended for a short period and the re-established group in January 2009 is only just beginning to have impact. Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development is good. Strategies to promote the safeguarding of looked after children and young people are good. There are some examples of outstanding practice, such as the training and development provided for schools and measures to ensure children and young people are not missing from education. Quality assurance and performance management are good and management information is used very effectively within the dedicated looked after children service to monitor, evaluate and review. However the difficulties with the ICS have increased the workload of practitioners significantly and detract from their direct work with looked after children and young people. As a result some critical information such as PEPS and school attendance information is missing from electronic records.

45. User engagement is good. The views of children and young people are actively sought and carefully considered. They make good contributions to planning and workforce development and frequently act as peer mentors. Practitioners, parents/carers and children and young people who talked to inspectors spoke very positively about the leaders and managers of the looked after children service, holding them in high regard and valuing greatly the support they receive.

46. Working in partnership is adequate. There are productive partnerships with most key stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector organisations and with other services in the council such as housing and the district councils, and these are contributing well to improvements in most outcome areas. However, the delivery of health services for looked after children lacks strategic direction. There is no overarching health strategy for the delivery of services to looked after children and financial constraints have meant that services are only provided to meet statutory requirements.

47. The promotion of equality and diversity for looked after children is good. There are several examples of excellent practice, such as the work with a small number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and support services for children and young people and their families from minority ethnic groups in Scarborough and Skipton. The pupil referral service, quality and improvement, and access and inclusion services make an excellent contribution to the promotion of equality and diversity in the way that they are managed and the services are delivered.

48. Value for money is good. Resources are used efficiently and effectively and are well matched to ambition and priorities. The unit costs associated with fostering and residential care are low, despite the high quality of the services. The use of commissioned placements is monitored rigorously to ensure needs are closely matched. Some Local Area Agreement targets, and notably the

target for improving educational attainment of looked after children, have not been achieved. However, performance against most national benchmarks is generally good and the council's proactive approach to financial management is supported by its membership of Institute of Public Finance benchmarking groups.

Record of main findings: North Yorkshire

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Adequate
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Inadequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Adequate

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Adequate
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution	Good
Economic well-being	Adequate
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness	Good
Assessment and direct work with children	Good
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Good
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Good
Value for money	Good