



Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Time and Date

2.00 pm on Thursday, 29th June, 2017

Place

Committee Room 3 - Council House

Public Business**1. Apologies and Substitutions****2. Declarations of Interests****3. Minutes** (Pages 3 - 8)

- a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 27th April, 2017
- b) Matters Arising

4. Ofsted Report (Pages 9 - 46)

Briefing Note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)

5. Any Other Business

Any other items of business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

Nil

Martin Yardley, Executive Director, Place, Council House Coventry

Wednesday, 21 June 2017

Notes: 1) The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Michelle Rose, Governance Services, Council House, Coventry, telephone 7683 3111, alternatively information about this meeting can be obtained from the following web link: <http://moderngov.coventry.gov.uk>

2) Council Members who are not able to attend the meeting should notify Michelle Rose as soon as possible and no later than 1.00 p.m. on 29th June, 2017 giving their reasons for absence and the name of the Council Member (if any) who will be attending the meeting as their substitute.

3) Scrutiny Board Members who have an interest in any report to this meeting, but who are not Members of this Scrutiny Board, have been invited to

notify the Chair by 12 noon on the day before the meeting that they wish to speak on a particular item. The Member must indicate to the Chair their reason for wishing to speak and the issue(s) they wish to raise.

Membership: Councillors S Bains, S Hanson (Co-opted Member), K Jones (Co-opted Member), B Kaur (By Invitation), D Kershaw, J Lepoidevin, A Lucas, P Male, K Maton (By Invitation), C Miks, K Mulhall, M Mutton (Chair), R Potter (Co-opted Member), E Ruane (By Invitation) and P Seaman

Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting OR if you would like this information in another format or language please contact us.

Lara Knight/Michelle Rose

Telephone: (024) 7683 3237/3111

e-mail: lara.knight@coventry.gov.uk michelle.rose@coventry.gov.uk

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 27 April 2017

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
 Councillor N Akhtar
 Councillor S Bains
 Councillor D Kershaw
 Councillor M Lapsa
 Councillor A Lucas
 Councillor P Male
 Councillor C Miks

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Cabinet Members: Councillor K Maton

Employees (by Directorate):

J Applegarth, People Directorate
S Giles, People Directorate
G Holmes, Place Directorate
P Kay, People Directorate
N MacDonald, People Directorate
K Nelson, People Directorate
M Rose, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillor D Gannon
 K Jones and R Potter

Public Business

79. Declarations of Interests

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

80. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6th April, 2017 were approved.

81. One Strategic Plan for School Organisation

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Education, Libraries and Adult Learning which provided an update on school organisation in Coventry.

The briefing note indicated that local authorities continued to have statutory responsibilities for school place planning, securing a sufficient supply of schools and school admissions. School organisation issues rarely affected schools in

isolation; therefore strong local authority and school partnerships were important to understanding the impact of school organisation decisions.

The briefing note recognised that as Coventry was a growing city and projections predicted a significant increase in the demand for school places from 2019/20 onwards, the focus had been to work in close collaboration and partnership with schools for an approach to address this predicable growth.

The work with schools to build and develop a Coventry Family of Schools and Partnership approach had been a strong foundation for this work. Appended to the briefing was the Primary and Secondary Partnership School Improvement structure and organisation. This partnership approach was irrespective of the status of schools (e.g. Maintained, Academy, Free, and University Technical College) and had led to the development of a set of principles leading to a Memorandum of Understanding (Appendix 3). This would be a basis for the development of options for the provision of new places moving forward.

The presentation provided information about:

- the education service vision, values and principles
- the strategic plan for school organisation
- partnership working
- criteria for additional places
- growth summary and planning
- Grammar schools

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Member and officers present on the following:

- Grammar schools
- Alternative provision / working differently
- Student number projections
- Special needs provision
- Home schooling
- Planning new developments
- Collaboration between schools
- Home schooling
- Local authority support following Ofsted assessment

Officers reassured members that school placements were reviewed every six months.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board noted the update and requested the following items be added to the work programme for the next municipal year:

- **Home schooling**
- **Local authority support following Ofsted action plan/progress report**

82. **Improving Quality and Performance of Social Workers**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children's Services regarding improving the Quality and Performance of Social Workers.

The report outlined the support, high expectations and challenge to Front Line Social Workers who provided direct intervention and services to children, young people, their families and carers. Coventry's Children's Services Social Workers provided early help and protection for children who were in need, Children Looked After, children placed for adoption and young people who were preparing to leave care. Social workers within the fostering service provided direct assessment and family placement services to foster carers.

The report detailed the following:

- recruitment strategy
- social work pathway
- social work academy
- social work teaching partnership
- social work accreditation
- performance of social workers
- supervision
- performance management review and appraisal
- management of poor performance

The Scrutiny Board questioned the officers present on the following:

- recent recruitment and retention of staff
- accreditation
- pathway progression
- appraisals and supervision
- training
- quality of performance

RESOLVED that :

- 1) the Scrutiny Board noted progress and request further information about whether the 61 recently appointed Social Workers had been retained and how many had met their accreditation**
- 2) a further report be considered in October, 2017**

83. **Commissioned Children's Services**

The Scrutiny Board noted a briefing note of the Director of Children's Services which provided an overview of Commissioned Services for Children and Young People.

The briefing note explained why services were commissioned from external providers, how services were commissioned, how services were procured, monitoring the quality of service and cost effectiveness of provision.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the officers present on the following:

- Monitoring visits
- Contract Monitoring and Quality Assurance of Supported Accommodation
- Working with providers
- Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes (England) Act 2015 requirement to visit homes
- Duration of contracts

84. **Improvement Board**

Further to Minute 59/16 the Scrutiny Board noted a joint briefing note which detailed progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan, reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board on 19th April, 2017 based on data from February, 2016. The next Improvement Board would be held on 7th June, 2017.

The Ofsted re-inspection of Children's Services commenced on 7th -30th March, 2017. The focus of the inspection was on practice, evidence and impact and did not include a review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board this time. The scope included:

- Children and young people who are receiving or who need early help
- Children and young people who are referred to the local authority and are assessed (or not)
- Children and young people who become the subject of a child protection plan or have been the subject of a plan and need continuing support
- Children who receiving support through a child in need plan
- Children looked after (with a plan for adoption, to return home, special guardianship or residence order, living with a foster family) and children accommodated
- Care Leavers

The purpose of the inspection was to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers
- Ascertain the extent to which the help, care and protection given to children and young people does protect them
- Whether services support families and improves the quality of lives and futures of children and young people
- Assess the quality of work to support children looked after and care leavers to meet their potential
- Examine the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight

The inspection lasted 4 weeks, overall feedback was provided by Inspectors on 30th March, 2017 to senior managers and elected members. The final report would be reported to a future Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board.

The report also contained the summary of short term priorities for improvement progress, and updates on the following:

- early help and partnership working

- quality and effectiveness of practice
- quality assurance and audit
- leadership and governance
- services for Looked After Children, care leavers and permanency

Appended to the report were a one-page summary of the Improvement Plan and a performance overview.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on leadership and governance and the publication of the Ofsted report.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board noted the progress and requested the Ofsted Action Plan be considered at a future meeting

85. **Outstanding Issues**

The Scrutiny Board noted the briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator regarding actions requested by the Board.

RESOLVED that the officers responsible for outstanding actions be contacted.

86. **Work Programme**

The Board noted the work programme.

87. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 3.30 pm)

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Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

29th June 2017

Subject: Re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) Consider the recommendations highlighted in the inspection report
 - 2) Identify any items to look at in more detail on the work programme 2017-18
 - 3) Receive the finalised Children's Services Improvement Plan at a future meeting in response to the Inspection report
 - 4) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Ofsted re-inspection of Children's Services

- 3.1 Children's Services were re-inspected by Ofsted 6-30 March 2017.
- 3.2 The focus on inspection was on practice, evidence and impact and did not include a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The scope included:
- Children and young people who are receiving or who need early help
 - Children and young people who are referred to the local authority and are assessed (or not)
 - Children and young people who become the subject of a child protection plan or have been the subject of a plan and need continuing support
 - Children who receiving support through a child in need plan
 - Children looked after (with a plan for adoption, to return home, special guardianship or residence order, living with a foster family) and children accommodated
 - Care Leavers

3.3 The purpose of the inspection was to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers
- Ascertain the extent to which the help, care and protection given to children and young people does not protect them
- Whether services support families and improve the quality of lives and futures of children and young people
- Assess the quality of work to support children looked after and care leavers to meet their potential
- Examine the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight

3.4 The Ofsted re-inspection of services report was published on **13th June 2017**, judged overall Children's Services in Coventry "**requires improvement to be good**." Services for Children are no longer inadequate, this marks a key point in the improvement journey and demonstrates the improvements made. The Ofsted judgements received are as follows:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • Children who need help and protection | Requires improvement |
| • Children looked after and achieving permanence | Requires improvement |
| - Adoption performance | Requires improvement |
| - Experience and progress of care leavers | Good |
| • Leadership, management and governance | Requires improvement |

3.5 The Department for Education DfE removed Children's Services from intervention on the 13 June 2017, this means the service are no longer subject to an improvement notice. Supervision and support will be provided by the DfE for the next 12 months, which will include two six month reviews.

3.6 The inspection report attached in **Appendix 1** identifies nine recommendations for improvement:

1. Continue to monitor and develop services through the work of the improvement board so that all children in Coventry receive the help and support that they need and their outcomes improve.
2. Ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board supports partners to understand and consistently apply appropriate thresholds to levels of need at every stage of the child's journey, including the early help pathway.
3. Ensure that the introduction of risk management methodology across the authority includes partners and the authority at all stages.
4. Improve the quality of chronologies to ensure that they provide relevant detail relating to children's histories and the impact of previous interventions.
5. Improve the quality of children's assessments and the focus of plans, so that all children at every stage of their journeys have their needs fully recognised and met.
6. Ensure that managers, independent chairs of child protection conferences and IROs improve their practice, by robustly chairing children's meetings and challenging any delays in their plans being progressed.
7. Review the authority's arrangements for privately fostered children and ensure that those arrangements and associated practice comply with statutory guidance.

8. Strengthen arrangements to ensure that the management of allegations of professional abuse is robust and effectively safeguards children.
9. Ensure that the progress of prospective adopters is tracked effectively so that the potential for children to be placed without delay is minimised.

4 Next steps

- 4.1 A Children's Services Improvement Plan has been developed in response to the Ofsted recommendations and areas for development.
- 4.2 The report identifies a number of issues for partners including the application of thresholds and the appetite for risk across the strategic safeguarding partnership. The Improvement Board will work to strengthen and provide assurance and governance role of partners and the LSCB. The LSCB will report on progress made in respect of the required areas of improvement that relate to partners.
- 4.3 The final Improvement Plan will be presented to a future Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and submitted to Ofsted and the DfE by 20 September 2017.
- 4.4 The report and revised Improvement plan will be shared with staff and partners and progress against the plan reported on a regular basis.

Authors:

Sonia Watson, Children's Services Programme Manager
John Gregg, Director of Children's Services

Contact details: john.gregg@coventry.gov.uk Tel: (024) 7683 3402
sonia.watson@coventry.gov.uk Tel: (024) 7683 1890

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Coventry City Council

Re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

Inspection date: 6 March to 30 March 2017

Report published: 13 June 2017

| Children's services in Coventry require improvement to be good | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Children who need help and protection | Requires improvement |
| 2. Children looked after and achieving permanence | Requires improvement |
| 2.1 Adoption performance | Requires improvement |
| 2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers | Good |
| 3. Leadership, management and governance | Requires improvement |

Executive summary

Services for children in Coventry are no longer inadequate and they now require improvement to be good. Senior leaders and elected members have, in the last 12 months, worked with intense focus to improve the quality of children's social care services and to ensure that children receive the help and protection that they need. While these improvements are evident and are benefiting children and their families, they are not yet fully embedded. Securing a stable and permanent senior management team has made a significant contribution to achieving this.

The local authority is aware of and has a detailed view of the strengths and weaknesses of its services for children. Senior leaders had already identified and made plans to remedy many of the deficits seen in this inspection. Elected members and senior managers are aware that their improvement journey must continue at pace. The children's services transformation plan is ambitious, and is appropriately focused to mitigate outstanding deficits, in relation to providing responsive, consistently good-quality support for children and their families.

The local authority has succeeded in establishing a robust initial response to children in need of services through its multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), and this is resulting in children receiving an improved response. Early-help services are effective and benefit families and children. Work remains to be done to ensure that partner agencies fully understand and apply local thresholds of need to consistently match the provision of services to levels of need.

A risk-averse culture of partners has resulted in too many referrals being accepted by children's social care that would more appropriately be dealt with by community-based services. As a result, some children are subject to social work assessments and intrusive child protection enquiries that result in no further action.

Quality assurance activity is established and has, until recently, focused largely on compliance. As a result, a firm baseline has been established, and managers have now appropriately begun to focus on the quality of practice. Further work is needed to fully embed this change in focus across the service.

For children who need immediate protection, the identification of and response to risk have improved, and actions taken to protect them are appropriate and effective. The quality of assessments and child protection planning is improving, strengthened by the use of a risk-management model to support child-focused practice. However, more work is required to support partner agencies in fully understanding and applying the methodology.

Planning for children requires focused attention to be good. Some plans meet children's needs well and reflect their changing circumstances, but, in those of poorer quality, progress is not being monitored effectively. A historical legacy of weak practice in relation to planning means that, for some children, the time taken

to improve their outcomes has been too long and further delayed by poor-quality interventions and a lack of relevant historical information.

The majority of children who become looked after are assessed appropriately, placed very swiftly and make positive progress towards early permanence. However, some children come into care too late. Adoption is considered for all children who need it, and the majority of children are placed for adoption without delay.

Children who have disabilities receive a good service, in which their wishes and feelings are fully taken into account. They are well supported by effective plans and, when they are looked after, they live in good-quality placements. Some children live in shared care arrangements, enabling them to maintain positive attachments with their families.

The vast majority of care leavers receive a good-quality service. They stay in safe, suitable homes and enjoy positive relationships with their personal advisers who keep in touch with them.

Despite some recent improvements, independent reviewing officers (IROs), child protection chairs and managers are not yet consistently ensuring that concerns about case progression are challenged effectively. In some cases, this means that delay in ensuring improved outcomes for children has continued. There is a robust and well-established strategic partnership approach to child sexual exploitation. The understanding of, and work with, children who are assessed to be at low risk of sexual exploitation, is less consistent. Return home interviews (RHIs) for children who go missing from care are leading to appropriate support.

A well-considered workforce strategy is now in place. The local authority understands the fragility of its staffing profile, and staff development is a priority.

The corporate parenting board is an active advocate for children looked after and care leavers. The Children in Care Council is well supported by elected members and senior managers. This work positively influences service response and design.

The current arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of privately fostered children are poor, and the local authority is not meeting its statutory duties in this area.

Arrangements to ensure the management of allegations of professional abuse are underdeveloped. More needs to be done to ensure an effective response.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area¹

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority operates three children's homes. Two were judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspections.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children who need help and protection was in January 2014. The local authority was judged to be inadequate.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after and achieving permanence was in January 2014. The local authority was judged to require improvement.

Local leadership

- The director of children's services has been in post since November 2015.
- The chief executive has been in post since April 2009.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 75,085 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Coventry. This is 22% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 25% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 18% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 17% (the national average is 14%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 47% of all children living in the area, compared to 22% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Black African and Asian Indian.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 33% (the national average is 20%)
 - in secondary schools is 30% (the national average is 16%).
- Coventry City is one of the national 'Prevent' duty priority areas.

¹ The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

Child protection in this area

- At 31 January 2017, 3,252 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 3,695 at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 January 2017, 489 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 66 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 494 (67 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 January 2017, 10 children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a reduction from 14 at 31 March 2016.
- In the two years before inspection, five serious incident notifications were submitted to Ofsted and five serious case reviews were completed.
- There was one serious case review ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 January 2017, 599 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 81 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 580 (78 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
 - 315 (or 59%) live outside the local authority area
 - 79 live in residential children's homes, of whom 75% live out of the authority area
 - no children live in residential special schools
 - 453 live with foster families, of whom 50% live out of the authority area
 - 14 live with parents, of whom none lives out of the authority area
 - 39 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Recommendations

1. Continue to monitor and develop services through the work of the improvement board so that all children in Coventry receive the help and support that they need and their outcomes improve.
2. Ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board supports partners to understand and consistently apply appropriate thresholds to levels of need at every stage of the child's journey, including the early-help pathway.
3. Ensure that the introduction of the risk management methodology across the authority includes partners and the authority at all stages.
4. Improve the quality of chronologies to ensure that they provide relevant detail relating to children's histories and the impact of previous interventions.
5. Improve the quality of children's assessments and the focus of plans, so that all children at every stage of their journeys have their needs fully recognised and met.
6. Ensure that managers, independent chairs of child protection conferences and IROs improve their practice, by robustly chairing children's meetings and challenging any delays in their plans being progressed.
7. Review the authority's arrangements for privately fostered children and ensure that those arrangements and associated practice comply with statutory guidance.
8. Strengthen arrangements to ensure that the management of allegations of professional abuse is robust and safeguards children effectively.
9. Ensure that the progress of prospective adopters is tracked effectively so that the potential for children to be placed without delay is maximised.

Summary for children and young people

- Children's services have improved and they are no longer inadequate.
- Managers are working hard to make sure that all children in Coventry are safe and that they receive help when they need it.
- Social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, health visitors and the police act together quickly to understand the problems faced by children and they make the right decisions to keep them safe from harm.
- Social workers get to know children very well. They listen to what they have to say. Social workers understand what is happening in children's lives and work out how best to help them.
- Sometimes, social workers take too long to understand what children need. Plans to help children do not always cover the right things, and it can take too long to obtain the right help for some children when they need it.
- Children who have disabilities have plans that ensure that they receive the right help and support when they need it.
- When children come into care, social workers find them good homes with caring adults. Sometimes, children need to live outside Coventry, as there are not enough carers in Coventry. Social workers make every effort to find the best possible adopters for children. Social workers always try to keep brothers and sisters together, and they help children to see people who are important to them.
- IROs are not always good at making sure that things are moving along as they should. This means that some children looked after have delays before they move to live with their permanent families. When children cannot return home to their own families, they understand the reasons for this.
- Managers listen carefully to what children have to say and use their ideas to improve services. The Children in Care Council is making sure that children get clear information about their rights.
- Care leavers receive good support to help them to take care of themselves and to be happy, safe, healthy and confident. Care leavers have safe places in which to live that are right for them. Personal advisers stay in touch with care leavers and make sure that they receive the right support when they need it.

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <p>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</p> | <p>Requires improvement</p> |
| <p>Summary</p> <p>The MASH has strong partnership arrangements, ensuring that the front door to children’s social care services works well. Children benefit from a timely, child-focused and appropriate response that protects them when concerns require immediate help and protection.</p> <p>Early-help services are child-focused, and families are engaged effectively to understand the problems they face. Team around the family (TAF) work is of a good quality, and children’s views influence plans that meet their needs. The wide range of early-help services enables more children to benefit from effective early support.</p> <p>Partner agencies make too many referrals to children’s social care that do not meet the threshold for a statutory children’s social care service. As a result, some children are subject to unnecessary social work assessments and child protection enquiries that result in no further action.</p> <p>The quality of assessments and child protection planning is improving, strengthened by the use of a risk assessment methodology that supports child-focused practice effectively. However, planning for children in need is not yet consistently robust, and the majority of plans do not respond to changing circumstances to ensure positive and timely outcomes. The legacy of ineffective historical interventions is still evident, and this means that some children have had their needs unmet for an unacceptably long time.</p> <p>Children who have disabilities receive a child-centred, good-quality service, whether they are children in need or subject to a child protection plan. They are well supported by skilled social workers, and their outcomes improve.</p> <p>Children’s voices are routinely heard and recorded in assessments, but children’s views do not always clearly feature in their plans. Advocacy services are not used enough to enable children to attend or be represented in meetings. For a small number of children, the focus on their parents’ needs and difficulties diverts attention from their own lived experiences.</p> <p>The current arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of privately fostered children are poor. The local authority is not meeting its duties in this area.</p> <p>Greater attention is required to ensure that the local authority fully discharges its responsibilities for managing allegations of professional abuse.</p> | |

Inspection findings

10. There is an established early-help offer providing effective early support and help for children and families. Early-help assessments are child-focused, informed by the child's and family's history, and families are engaged effectively to understand the problems that they face. Children are seen quickly and frequently, and practitioners see them alone. Children's views are sought and listened to through direct work with them. TAF meetings take place routinely to review and adapt plans to ensure that they continue to address concerns and identified needs.
11. Good work by common assessment framework (CAF) coordinators, who are aligned with schools, supports community-based partnership working and has a wide reach to provide advice and guidance. However, more needs to be done in this area to embed a comprehensive understanding of the local threshold for referrals to statutory children's social care services. Social workers based in the local authority early-help service are having a positive impact on and making a difference to children's outcomes as a result of their focus on how the application of this threshold is applied. Their detailed and appropriate case discussions are ensuring that step-up and step-down arrangements are improving, are appropriate and are seamless.
12. A well-established MASH responds effectively to referrals to social care. Decision-making is timely, and consistently robust practice ensures that consent is always obtained appropriately. Multi-agency enquiries in the MASH, including domestic abuse triage, are thorough, and detailed family information is gathered from partners and used to inform assessments of concern and risk. Safeguarding concerns and risks are consistently recognised, which ensures that children receive swift and appropriate intervention. Management oversight of decision-making is routine and always recorded on children's case records. In the majority of cases, the rationale underpinning decisions is recorded well, but in some cases the detail is limited due to the volume of work entering the system.
13. When children may need immediate protection, timely strategy meetings appropriately analyse presenting concerns and degrees of risk and appropriately decide what actions need to be taken. The meetings make good use of historical information, and the majority are well attended by all of the relevant professionals. Partner agencies routinely receive written records of the meetings, and in most cases the record provides a thorough account of events.
14. The local authority's out-of-hours service is effective in safeguarding children and offering expertise and advice, and it provides timely interventions. The service has good access to a range of support, including legal advice, crisis intervention/edge of care services and placements for children in need of care. Social workers in the out-of-hours service are notified when children are

- missing. They are also made aware of, and respond effectively to, children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation.
15. A historical risk-averse approach and culture in the city has meant that, when partner agencies have concerns about a child, they refer the matter to children's social care, with the result that the local authority undertakes too many assessments of need and too many child protection enquiries. Many of these lead to no further intervention. Recently, and to address this issue, when assessments are completed managers have started to make clear and appropriate recommendations for a child's needs to be met by community-based/early-help services and step the case down. However, this work is at an early stage and has yet to demonstrate the desired impact.
 16. Overall, the quality of assessments has improved over the past six months, but they are not yet consistently good. Pre-birth assessments, however, are of good quality and are effective in informing future intervention. Good partnership work means that social workers receive early alerts from health colleagues, and this provides the necessary time to complete comprehensive assessments. The vast majority of all assessments are completed in a timely way. When assessments of need are required, the majority offer appropriate analysis and recommendations based on findings. Use of a recognised methodology to identify and assess risk, when used in some assessments, supports a more in-depth analysis and this, in turn, results in better plans.
 17. The voice of children is evident in many assessments. Children are seen alone, and purposeful, direct work is done to gather their wishes and feelings. However, although children are involved effectively in assessments, their views do not always clearly inform planning. The views of birth parents, including absent parents, are routinely sought and they are recorded and considered well in assessments. Not all chronologies are up to date or give sufficient focus to the most relevant issues. This means that some assessments do not take full account of, or benefit from a consideration of, past events. Many assessments, although not all, recognise and understand the impact that cultural issues have on children and their families.
(Recommendation)
 18. Management oversight in the social work teams is evident in children's case records, and the quality of case recording is improving. However, some managers have been slow to challenge delay in progressing plans, which results in some children having remained in circumstances in which all of their needs have not been met in a timely way. Many case records now evidence effective use of an established risk assessment methodology, and this is helping managers to improve practice. Managers have access to a wide range of management information and now use performance data well to manage their team's work, improving timeliness of assessments, visits and plans.
 19. Decision-making in the area of child protection is robust, and no children are subject of a child protection plan unless the appropriate threshold has been

met. The facilities for holding child protection case conferences are good, and sensitive arrangements are made to support parents and carers to be fully involved, although it remains the case that too few children attend their own conferences. Child protection conferences are well chaired and attended by relevant partners, so that all relevant information can be considered. The benefits of using a risk assessment methodology at conferences have been limited, as partners are not yet fully familiar with this framework and struggle to contribute effectively.

20. Children who are the subject of child protection plans are seen regularly by their social workers, and their views and opinions are sought and taken into account. Core groups are well attended and are appropriately focused on progressing the child protection plan and reducing risks. Monthly discussions between child protection chairs and social workers are starting to support swifter progression of plans, and fewer children in Coventry remain subject to child protection plans for too long without positive change. These measures have led to a 29% reduction in the overall numbers of child protection plans, from 695 in March 2015 to 489 plans at the time of the inspection. Additionally, the effectiveness of escalation and challenge by chairs has been limited until recently, but is starting to support and demonstrate improved scrutiny and challenge.
21. Children who live in families in which adult mental ill health, misuse of substances and domestic abuse feature are not always at the centre of planning. This means that multi-agency intervention is often too adult-focused. A range of effective support services are available for children, victims and perpetrators. However, support is not always available when children need it and, in some cases, this leads to a minimisation of risk and an over-optimistic view of the child's lived experience. More recently, the local authority has started to focus on these children to ensure that the help that they receive has the desired impact. In contrast, good, effective work to help parents to realise the impact that behaviour such as alcohol misuse has on their children is undertaken by social workers in the children with disabilities team.
22. Multi-agency risk assessment conference arrangements are mature, and conferences are well attended by a range of appropriate agencies. Evidence seen by inspectors demonstrates an appropriate focus on children, and their experiences are given due consideration.
23. Well-embedded arrangements are in place to plan for high-risk adults through multi-agency public protection arrangements. As a result, children at risk of harm are safeguarded.
24. The majority of children supported under children in need arrangements have plans in place monitored by regular multi-agency child in need meetings. However, the majority of plans lack the rigour and focus of the risk assessment methodology seen within child protection plans. Social workers

and managers do not always recognise and challenge false compliance effectively and this, in turn, can result in over-optimistic planning. Children who have disabilities are well supported by good plans that fully include their wishes and feelings. Impressive direct work ensures that their impairment is not a barrier to their wishes being known and taken account of.
(Recommendation)

25. Children who are at potential risk of child sexual exploitation are protected by proactive and effective interventions. Those who are assessed as being at high or medium risk of harm benefit from a good service from the specialist Horizon team, which provides wraparound support from a range of professionals. This work reduces risk effectively by helping children to recognise signs of exploitation so that they can better protect themselves. Children who are assessed as being at low risk of child sexual exploitation receive help that is not as focused and is inconsistent. This is an area for development that has been recognised by the local authority and is being addressed by the child sexual exploitation champions, who are taking their knowledge and expertise into the children's social care and early-help teams. The local authority partnership has successfully prosecuted perpetrators and prevented other potential victims from exploitation. Children are supported effectively and safely to give evidence in court, which has helped them to tell their stories and to be heard.
26. Children who go missing are protected by well-coordinated multi-agency activity. RHIs enable children to be listened to, and risks and the reasons behind missing episodes to be understood. The learning from RHIs reduces the risk of repeated missing episodes for a number of children. The links with child sexual exploitation and other vulnerabilities is understood, and, when appropriate, information is gathered to plan effective disruption activity, resulting in an improved safeguarding response.
27. Effective and responsive culturally sensitive work with relevant partners ensures that risks of female genital mutilation are recognised and suitable action is taken. Threats of forced marriage are responded to sensitively, and young people are actively involved in the planning. Court orders are secured when required, ensuring that children remain safe.
28. Partnership arrangements are well established and provide an effective response to the risk to young people from radicalisation. Work between social workers and partners is proportionate and sensitive and based on good intelligence. However, social workers do not regularly attend or make referrals to the Channel panel. Further training is under way to ensure that social workers fulfil their roles in this respect.
29. A clear and effective pathway ensures that homeless 16- and 17-year olds receive a thorough assessment that identifies their needs. Young people have access to a range of safe and suitable accommodation, including to temporary accommodation on an urgent basis. Risks are clearly identified and inform

decisions about placement and support plans. Young people, when appropriate, are taken into care. Effective management oversight ensures that the local authority fully complies with its statutory duties.

30. Effective arrangements are in place to support children who are electively home educated, including the undertaking of appropriate checks. The approach to children missing education is robust. A central register is monitored on a regular basis, and continuing enquiries about the whereabouts of children who are not attending school are made to other local authorities, health agencies, children's social care and the police.
31. The local authority does not meet its responsibilities for privately fostered children. There is insufficient rigour in the arrangements to assess and support children placed within private fostering placements, and the local authority cannot be assured that privately fostered children are adequately safeguarded. (Recommendation)
32. The management of allegations against professionals is improving from a low base, but is not yet effective. Decision-making is appropriate, but more work is required to ensure a consistent follow-up of agreed actions. (Recommendation)

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| <p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p> | <p>Requires improvement</p> |
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Children looked after continue to receive services that require improvement. While there are no children looked after who should not be looked after, too many children have entered care in an unplanned way or too late. More recently, children entering care are benefiting from improved services. The majority of children are assessed appropriately, placed very swiftly and make positive progress towards early permanence.</p> <p>Social workers visit children looked after and know them well. However, this valuable knowledge is not always reflected as well as it could be in case records or assessments. Care plans do not always address the full range of a child’s needs.</p> <p>The vast majority of children looked after live in good-quality foster placements. However, many children live outside of the local authority area and at a distance from their families. This is as a result of there being too few locally based foster placements.</p> <p>Most children looked after have their care plans reviewed on a regular and timely basis, but IROs do not consistently provide effective challenge to ensure that care plans are progressed without delay.</p> <p>Adoption is considered for all children who need a permanent alternative family. Children are swiftly identified, matched and placed with their adoptive families. The tracking of how long it takes for prospective adopter assessments to be completed needs to improve to ensure that delays in placing children with adopters do not occur.</p> <p>The response to children looked after who are at risk of sexual exploitation is effective and reduces risks. RHIs for children who go missing from care lead to appropriate support and risks being minimised.</p> <p>Educational outcomes for children looked after are improving at key stage 1 and 2. At key stage 4, the proportion of children who achieve at least the expected level of progress in their studies is similar to both the regional and national rates.</p> <p>Care leavers live in good-quality accommodation and enjoy positive relationships with their personal advisers who stay in touch with them. A high number of care leavers are in education, employment or training.</p> | |

Inspection findings

33. When children are at risk of being accommodated, the good quality and accessible crisis intervention service supports them to remain at home when it is in their best interest. Children who have a plan to return home from care are appropriately assessed and they are supported to return home safely. This is resulting in fewer children returning to care, which is positive.
34. Recent improvements in the understanding and application of pre-proceedings work means that more timely action is being taken, with an increased response to risks, and the progression of key actions without delay. Children who are likely to become subject to a care order are being identified early in the process by effective use of the Public Law Outline, including effective letters before proceedings. However, when the risks of care are high, family group conferences are not yet being used frequently enough to identify potential carers within the child's own network. The burden of completing these unnecessary assessments is contributing to some delays in permanence planning for a very small number of children.
35. The judiciary reports that the quality of social work reports from the city's court-based assessment service (CBAS) is consistently good and work is of a high standard. Additionally, the work of the family drug and alcohol court (FDAC) is effective. The CBAS and FDAC work hard to gain the views of children, by arranging meetings between children and judges when appropriate. Good court care plans clearly identify children's needs, resulting in children achieving improved outcomes.
36. The timeliness of care proceedings being completed is too slow, at an average of 32 weeks, compared to a national target of 26 weeks. Managers recognise this and have implemented a tracking tool to address this issue. IROs are starting to escalate concerns formally. However, it is too early to see the impact of this corrective action.
37. Assessments for children looked after are not always updated when their circumstances change, and some plans do not address new or emerging issues. However, the vast majority of children contribute to, or attend, their children looked after reviews, and their needs are clearly identified through that process. Most care plans presented at the second review are not sufficiently focused to identify what route to permanence may best suit a particular child and, in some cases, are based on over-optimistic viability assessments. For a small number of children, this means that permanence decisions are delayed. Overall, care plans are not sufficiently outcome-focused and some do not detail the full range of an individual child's needs.
38. A range of permanence options are routinely considered for all children who cannot return home. Special guardianship assessments are timely and child-focused and include good-quality partnership work. When children are placed

with special guardians, they receive regular support from their social workers, and their guardians are provided with relevant training.

39. Some children do not yet have a choice of a local or in-house placement when they become looked after. More children than the authority would wish live outside of the local authority boundary in foster care and residential care. Managers are aware that more children would benefit from being placed nearer their families and friends within the city area. An ambitious foster carer recruitment campaign is under way, but it has yet to deliver the desired impact.
40. Commissioning work is starting to meet the needs of children looked after. Good progress is being made on key projects, including edge-of-care services, recommissioning of independent residential services, the redesign of internal residential provision, supported accommodation and fostering, with reasonable timescales for the completion of the work. Joint commissioning of dedicated mental health services for children looked after is developing with the co-location of a mental health practitioner in the children looked after social worker teams to ensure that assessments are carried out promptly and that children have a clear and easy pathway into the most appropriate service.
41. The assessment and support of foster carers is effective. Foster carer assessments are of a good quality and enable the fostering panel and the agency decision-maker to reach clear, appropriate decisions. A wide-ranging programme of training is provided, and all carers are supported to attend relevant courses. Foster carers value the 24-hour support available to them when issues arise out of office hours. They actively support each other through regular support groups and mentoring arrangements for new foster carers. The local authority has reviewed its offer to local authority foster carers by increasing fees and offering improved training. Carers reported that they feel valued for the work that they do.
42. Carers receive good-quality information about children who live with them. The arrangements for delegated authority are clear and regularly reviewed. This enables carers to make appropriate decisions about children's lives. Children are encouraged to engage in a range of leisure and sporting activities, supported by their carers, including dancing, swimming lessons, football and clubs. Young people told inspectors that as well as having access to a wide range of leisure activities, they receive free leisure and gym passes and enjoy a large number of events for all age ranges run by the children's participation service. All children, regardless of where they live, are able to access the same services and receive a consistent level of support.
43. Social workers take the time to get to know their children well. Children told inspectors that they have positive relationships with their social workers, whom they see alone. A small number of children experience frequent changes of social workers, and this results in their having reduced

opportunities to build the trusting and enduring relationships with their social workers that most of their peers have.

44. Children looked after who have disabilities benefit from relationships with skilled social workers who understand their needs and know them well. The service that they receive is responsive to their needs and takes account of their views. Assessments and plans in this service are of good quality and support improved outcomes effectively for children and young people. Management oversight is good, and an established risk assessment methodology is well embedded in the service.
45. The local authority is successful in placing children together with their brothers and sisters. However, 'together or apart' assessments do not give sufficient consideration to the nature and type of attachments that brothers and sisters have to one another and the significant adults in their lives. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to understand how significant decisions have been reached, and often the final decision is left to the courts. The vast majority of children have regular and meaningful contact with their families, when it is in their best interests.
46. Children looked after know about their rights and entitlements. They are supported to complain and they have access to independent advocates. However, this resource is not well used by children looked after. Children have been fully involved in the design and development of the new complaints process. When there is a concern that a child looked after is being bullied, professionals and foster carers are effective at reducing this risk.
47. Independent visitors are successfully supporting a significant number of children to establish positive and enduring relationships outside of their birth families. Every effort is made to identify independent visitors for children. As a result, the local authority has successfully ensured that every child who is identified as requiring an independent visitor has that opportunity. Fifty-three children have independent visitors, and a further 10 are matched and undergoing introductions.
48. Not all children in long-term foster care benefit from life story work. When life story work is undertaken, the quality is not sufficiently good to ensure that all children are able to explore their childhood experiences fully or to the extent that they have a clear understanding of what has happened to them and why. For a small number of children, life story work is of good quality and is meaningful, having the desired impact of supporting them to understand why they are looked after.
49. Children looked after who go missing are offered and make good use of well-coordinated RHIs. Information gathered is used to manage and minimise risks and helps social workers and carers to understand the reasons why children and young people go missing. Support is then offered at a level proportionate

to individual circumstances and, as a result, their incidence of going missing is reduced.

50. Children placed in Coventry benefit from effective work to reduce the risk of child sexual exploitation. Risk assessments are based on a thorough understanding of children's experiences. Proactive disruption work is undertaken with partners. A very small number of children live at a distance from home to protect them; consequently, they are separated from their networks and do not always benefit from seeing their families frequently enough.
51. The vast majority of children's health needs are met. There are delays in the completion of initial health assessments for a minority of children. The impact of these delays is minimal for most children. However, when children present with needs relating to their emotional well-being, the results of strength and difficulties questionnaires are not shared with health agencies. Managers are fully aware of this issue and have taken action to remedy it by co-locating specialist practitioners with social work teams. Although this is positive progress, it is too early to see the impact of these changes for individual children.
52. The head of the virtual school is providing effective support for the 405 pupils on roll and has initiated a number of improvements across the school, including the development of an early years personal education plan (PEP) for younger children and a post-16 PEP. The majority of PEPs are of a good standard. Most children looked after are now achieving 'good levels of development' in the early years foundation stage. However, at key stage 2, too few children who are looked after make the necessary level of progress in reading or writing. At key stage 4, the proportion of children who achieve at least the expected level of progress in their studies is similar to both the regional and national rates. The proportion of children who left school at the end of year 11 and progressed to education, employment or training declined from 91% in 2013–14 to 85% in 2015–16.
53. The proportion of children looked after who are now attending a good or better school has increased over time, from 62% in 2013–14 to 82%. Children placed in schools that are less than good are regularly monitored by the virtual school to ensure that they receive the support that they need.
54. Social workers and managers understand their responsibilities for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This means that the 28 children, who are currently appropriately looked after by the local authority, are receiving effective support. The diverse needs of children in Coventry are understood and responded to well by social workers and carers. Sensitive work is undertaken, such as supporting children to make positive and enduring links with member of their own faith and community and ensuring that placements meet their cultural needs.

55. An active and effective Children in Care Council, known as 'Voices of Care', is supported well by specialist workers and includes representatives from all age groups of children looked after. The Children in Care Council is consulted on a wide range of issues and meets regularly with elected members and senior managers. Its work results in frequent events for children looked after, which children benefit from. It has also designed welcome packs for children as they come into care, and it regularly reviews and comments on social work policies. All of this work is making a difference to the lives of children looked after in Coventry.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it requires improvement

56. Adoption is considered for all those children who need a permanent alternative family, when it is in their best interests. The authority has worked hard to improve its performance and to ensure that children are offered the opportunity of a secure and well-matched adoptive placement in as short a time as possible. Its tenacious practice is evident through the improvements in the timeliness measured by the national adoption scorecard. The average time for a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is much lower than the national threshold. This demonstrates that children are being placed for adoption without unnecessary delay. Increasingly, social workers are appropriately referring children for adoption at an early stage, to ensure that the opportunities for successful family finding are maximised, and children who may benefit from a plan of adoption are tracked effectively to ensure that their plan can be achieved without delay.
57. The local authority is ambitious to seek adoption for all children who may need it, including those who might be considered as challenging to place. These children have a range of needs that include being older, diversity of cultural heritage, having complex health needs and larger family groups. High numbers of brothers and sisters live together successfully. Children who have diverse needs, by virtue of age, brother or sister relationships or ethnicity, achieve permanence through adoption.
58. The local authority has made significant progress in reducing the number of adoption decisions rescinded in the past 12 months to only one child. The local authority is successful in achieving alternative permanence plans, such as long-term fostering for children when adoption is not in their best interests.
59. A range of options are pursued for family finding, including exchange events, activity days, collaboration with regional partners and access to national adoption links. Adopter and children profiles are of a high standard, and provide sensitive and engaging information. The profiles successfully promote and assist family finding for Coventry children and adopters. There are internal exchange mornings once a month that enable the early identification of children and prospective adopters.
60. Fostering for adoption needs greater promotion. In the past year, only two children have benefited from living in a foster to adopt placement. The number of fostering to adopt arrangements has declined since the last inspection. The local authority recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that there are sufficient adopters for very young babies.
61. The local authority has worked hard to reduce the numbers of children waiting for adoption. In October 2016, active family finding was under way for 19

children, and no child was waiting unnecessarily. The local authority uses regional and partnership arrangements to identify appropriate adopters. Inspectors saw a number of successful matches through the use of exchange events. A number of children have been adopted by their foster carers.

62. Social workers help children and young people to understand their family circumstances and their identities as they prepare for adoption. Children receive 'life story' and 'moving on' work, which is child-centred, sensitive and purposeful. As a result, children are prepared well for their adoption journey. The vast majority of this work is completed within the child's timescale. Later life letters are not always completed for children. The local authority acknowledges that supporting birth parents in writing later life letters will strengthen practice.
63. The recruitment, preparation, assessment, training and support of adopters are undertaken by appropriately skilled and experienced social workers. Not all adopter assessments are completed within timescales, and action has been taken to improve the quality and timeliness of adopter assessments. The adoption team has completed a wide range of relevant specialist training to support their work; adopters describe the advice and practical support available to them as invaluable.
64. The preparation of Coventry's own adopters does not always prepare them to meet the needs of the children who are waiting to be placed. As a result, 38 adopters are waiting to be matched, and a small number have been waiting in excess of a year. All adopters are encouraged to join the adoption register, and they are appropriately supported to access Link Maker, facilitating adopter-led adoptions.
65. Management information systems in the adoption service are heavily reliant on manual processes. Data is not comprehensive and does not provide a clear overview that supports accurate understanding or easy understanding of where blockages in the system might be. For example, the authority does not know exactly what progress prospective adopters are making. This is an area of current vulnerability and does not place the authority in a position of strength, moving into regional arrangements. The authority has a clear and well-understood vision for the development of the service, but not all of the necessary systems are in place to support consistent practice.
(Recommendation)
66. The adoption panel is chaired well. Arrangements are robust, and appropriate processes are in place to consider recommendations for approval and matching. Agency decisions are appropriate and timely. There have been some delays in the timeliness and quality of reports presented to panel, and, while this has improved, the quality assurance role of panel adviser could support social workers and managers to develop their knowledge of good practice further. The high profile of adoption in the council is evident, and

elected members take an active role in promoting adoption as a positive permanence option.

67. The authority responds to and identifies learning from placement disruption. Disruption meetings are independently chaired and well-minuted. Features that contribute to disruption include poor prospective adopter reports, poor preparation for children and adopters and rushed introductions. The authority has, however, been slow in providing disruption reports to the adoption panel, and this impedes early learning opportunities for the adoption panel and the wider service.
68. When children and their adopters require support, social work assessments are succinct, sensitive and thorough. They demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the needs of children and their adopters. Adoption support plans are not always comprehensive, and not all are updated to formally reflect the child's placement with their adoptive family. However, social workers can clearly articulate the needs of children and adopters. Inspectors saw appropriate and creative use of the adoption support fund in providing bespoke therapeutic help. The vast majority of adopters spoken to reported feeling well supported. Adopters' families and friends receive training in how to help settle adopted children into their new homes.
69. The authority has arrangements in place to provide support and counselling to birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption. This valuable work supports birth parents in accepting adoption as the right plan for their child. As a result, they are more willing to provide relevant information and to meet their child's adopters.
70. The authority is an active participant in the development and implementation of Adoption Central England Regional Adoption Agency. There is a clear project plan to develop adoption services in Coventry. Integrated working with the sharing of resources is evident across the region.

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

71. Care leavers feel safe in their homes and are well supported by personal advisers who know and understand them. Personal advisers take an active interest in helping them at times of transition in their lives. As a result, most care leavers develop into independent and resilient adults.
72. Care leavers are aware of the importance of, and have received guidance on, how to keep themselves safe while on line, including how to recognise the signs of cyber-bullying and grooming. Personal advisers benefit from regular professional training and use their extensive range of relevant expertise so that they are alert to and vigilant for any signs that young people may be at risk.
73. The quality of pathway plans for care leavers requires further improvement to improve their focus and provide clearer detail about the range of support that young people can expect to help them to achieve their goals. Plans contain essential identity information, such as national insurance, health information and driving licence numbers. However, they do not always record in sufficient detail the next steps that may encourage or motivate young people to attain qualifications or broaden their horizons. Reviews of progress against previously set targets are too often cursory, and many plans have targets that are not easily measurable. The introduction of the 16-plus PEPs is a very positive addition to the planning for care leavers and, at this stage, a very few require the same improvements. (Recommendation)
74. The local authority is effective at staying in contact with care leavers. Personal advisers have manageable caseloads of approximately 25 young people and visit them at least in line with statutory requirements. At the time of the inspection, the proportion of care leavers whom staff were in touch with was 97.6%, and contact rates have improved in each year since the previous inspection in 2014. Similarly, the percentage of pathway plans completed on time has improved and is equally high, at 94.9%. Personal advisers are tenacious at making good use of a range of approaches to make contact with care leavers, particularly the few that are hard to reach or difficult to engage. Advisers use a variety of online text and messaging services, both to establish contact and to remind care leavers of their entitlement to ongoing support until they reach 21 years of age or, where appropriate, until they are 25. As a result, care leavers know how to access help and have confidence in their personal advisers who know them well.
75. The local authority has an effective staying-put policy that encourages young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 or until they

feel ready to move on to a more independent setting. Currently, just over a quarter of care leavers have chosen to stay put.

76. The very large majority of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. Relevant pre-placement checks ensure that accommodation is safe and that young people feel secure. Care leavers have a degree of choice about where they live. Approximately a quarter are living in semi-independent accommodation with an attached key worker who provides additional help and support. Personal advisers and key workers jointly assess the level of support needed to ensure that it meets the young person's specific needs. The local authority gives care leavers priority in providing accommodation; as a result, the care leavers are successful in making the transition into independent living and gaining a tenancy of their own. At the time of the inspection, no young people were living in bed and breakfast accommodation or houses in multiple occupation.
77. Care leavers who are parents or expectant parents benefit from effective partnership working between their personal adviser, midwives and other specialist support partners. These specialist services prioritise care leavers and support them in developing their emotional resilience and parenting skills to look after their children. Young people who are expectant parents are actively encouraged to engage in a range of carefully considered activities and programmes that equip them with the skills to plan for their futures and to meet the health, welfare and emotional needs of their unborn children.
78. Personal advisers are skilled at encouraging care leavers who self-disclose that they are misusing drugs or alcohol, to access appropriate help. A local charity provides confidential drop-in sessions that offer advice and guidance regarding substance misuse and access to sexual health services.
79. Most care leavers understand their rights and entitlements contained in the Coventry pledge; this includes advocacy, involvement in decisions that affect them personally, such as where they live, and access to their personal files. Information on the pledge is readily available on the internet and through leaflets and posters.
80. The majority of care leavers have an up-to-date health assessment. This ensures that most young people benefit from regular access to a range of health professionals. The local authority has been slow in ensuring that all care leavers receive a summary of their health histories. At the time of the inspection, only approximately half of care leavers had an up-to-date health history. This means that, at the point at which they leave care, young people may not have full information about their health profiles from birth, including their immunisation status. Plans are in place to ensure that all care leavers have access to their complete health profiles.
81. Planning and progress towards independence for care leavers are good. Young people benefit from an effective handover from their social worker to

their allocated personal adviser; this enables them to develop trusting relationships during this key transition stage. Most care leavers attend an independence support programme, consisting of budgeting skills and cooking courses. This support equips them well. However, for some care leavers the independence support package is arranged late in their transition pathway and does not focus enough on the emotional challenges and coping strategies that they may need to employ when living alone. A few care leavers do not successfully develop the emotional maturity or the practical skills that they need for successful independent living. As a result, they have suffered a loss of tenancy due to rent arrears or unsocial behaviour. Care leavers who need additional support or further opportunities to succeed are promptly supported by their personal advisers who intervene to minimise disruption, including ensuring that they are rehoused quickly.

82. The educational progress of care leavers studying beyond school-leaving age is good. For example, the proportion of care leavers who successfully progress to positive employment, education, and training destinations has rapidly improved over time from 35.9% (2013–14) to an in-year figure of 66.7% (2016–17). Similarly, the number of care leavers who now progress to higher education has increased from 11 young people in 2014 to 24 at the time of the inspection. Care leavers who go to university are supported financially in line with the national minimum bursary levels. Accommodation is available during holiday periods for those who are not able to return to their former carers.
83. The local authority, as a major local employer, has committed itself to creating suitable vacancies for any care leaver who expresses an interest in an apprenticeship, thus enabling more young people to develop and gain valuable work-related training skills. To date, eight care leavers are now employed as apprentices by the authority, and they are working across a range of departments. One care leaver who is employed as an apprentice with the authority described to inspectors with pride how their self-esteem and confidence had rapidly grown as a result of the apprenticeship programme, which they described as a 'great experience'.
84. The local authority has recently commissioned an external provider to work with care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). As a result of a more strategic focus, overall NEET figures have declined from 64.1% (2013–14) to an in-year figure of 32% (2016–17), indicating a good level of performance in comparison with similar authorities.
85. The achievements of children looked after and care leavers are regularly celebrated by the local authority through an annual celebratory event. The event includes care leavers, foster carers and others who have had a significant impact on the lives of young people.

| Leadership, management and governance | Requires improvement |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>The senior management team in Coventry has a clear vision for service improvement. Together with the chief executive and elected members, it demonstrates strong strategic leadership. Senior managers are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of children’s services, having already identified and taken action on many of the deficits seen in this inspection. They know what ‘good’ services should look like and how outcomes for children and families need to be improved. The improvement board now challenges the speed and quality of service development, but progress has been slow and the pace of improvement has only gained momentum in the last 12 months. Significant challenges remain. Not all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection in 2014 are complete. The local authority is not yet providing good enough services for all children in Coventry.</p> <p>The authority has succeeded in establishing a robust initial response to children and families in need of services, through its MASH. There is an effective early-help offer, but partner agencies do not yet fully understand all the thresholds to services and their role in provision of services at an early preventative stage. An overcautious approach to risk has meant that some children experience unnecessary intervention.</p> <p>Social work practice is not as effective as it should be in ensuring timely outcomes for children. As a result, some children have experienced delay. Poor management oversight and lack of challenge have led to drift in some cases. However, for children who need protection, there is a focus on reducing risk. Almost all children who come into the care of Coventry now achieve good outcomes. Adoption is achieved in a timely manner. Planning and progress for care leavers towards independence is good.</p> <p>There is a robust and well-established strategic partnership approach to child sexual exploitation. Disruption activity is successful, and Coventry has a history of prosecution of offenders and support of victims. Despite a robust approach to young people at medium and high risk of child sexual exploitation, through a well-regarded specialist Horizon team, the understanding of, and work with, children who are assessed to be at low risk of sexual exploitation is less consistent in other fieldwork teams.</p> <p>The local authority has struggled to establish and maintain workforce stability in children’s services in recent years. A well-considered workforce strategy is now in place. Staffing is showing signs of stability, and the authority has been successful in the recruitment of qualified staff. Many staff are relatively inexperienced, but the authority understands the fragility of its staffing profile, and staff development is a priority.</p> | |

Inspection findings

86. The senior management team in Coventry has a clear vision for service improvement. Together with the chief executive and elected members, senior managers demonstrate strong strategic leadership. They are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of children's services, having already identified many of the deficits seen in this inspection. They know what 'good' services should look like and how outcomes for children and families need to be improved. They are seeking to ensure continued progress through a robust improvement board and have now established an improvement trajectory after initial slow progress. However, significant challenges remain, and the local authority is not yet providing good enough services for all children in Coventry.
87. The local authority has strengthened the frontline response to children and families in need of services with the establishment of a robust MASH. This is ensuring a timely response to contacts and the identification of risk to children. The early-help offer is substantially stronger through the involvement of social care services in undertaking more complex CAFs, Partners who undertake less complex assessments of need remain uncertain about the application of thresholds, both at the CAF level and higher levels of need, and this has contributed to high numbers of both contacts and referrals to social care. (Recommendation)
88. Social work practice is not always effective in ensuring timely outcomes for children. In some cases, this has meant that plans do not clearly identify actions and outcomes. There has been slow progress towards establishing a quality practice base, partly because of a need to establish compliance with policy and practice standards first. This, together with a risk-averse culture in social care services and across partners, has meant that too many children are subject to an unnecessary level of intervention. Too many social care assessments and child protection enquiries lead to little or no further social care intervention.
89. For the majority of those children who need protection, there is a focus on achieving good outcomes through effective partnership working. For children in need, the focus of work is less clear, and this means, for some, delays in achieving better outcomes. When children come into the care of the local authority, the outcomes for the vast majority of children are positive. Progress towards permanence for some children in care has historically been slow and has not always met children's timescales. However, all children who should be considered for adoption are, and they are placed with adopters in a timely manner. For many children who remain in the care of the local authority, services in preparation for their leaving care lead to better outcomes as a result.

90. Social workers identify children's wishes and feelings. Children's views are incorporated in assessments of need. Advocacy support is increasingly supporting children's voices, although the number of advocates remains low.
91. Performance data is comprehensive and made widely available to all managers and individual teams. Performance focuses on achievement against targets and compares to local and national averages. On this basis, managers are aware of underperformance internally, in relation to neighbours and nationally.
92. Senior leaders and managers are aware that effective quality assurance is key to improving core practice and outcomes for children. Their initial and appropriate focus was on compliance and, to achieve that, they developed a good-quality audit tool that has supported their improvements to date. A recent revision to the quality assurance programme, with a greater focus on quality of practice, now requires all levels of management to participate in audit activity. The authority acknowledges that the revised framework is too recently implemented to evidence substantial impact on the quality of practice.
93. The quality of management oversight of casework is too variable. For some children's cases, there is a lack of focus on timely progression of plans. While supervision is regular, and some good examples were seen of consideration of complex situations, there is often a lack of reflection and analysis. This means that the Coventry message about 'getting to good' is not being reinforced in supervision and is not yet making the impact that it should.
(Recommendation)
94. The Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service has identified that the timeliness of proceedings has recently shown some deterioration from an average of 26 weeks in 2016 to a current average of 32 weeks. Delays in assessment completion, particularly the assessment of family members, contribute to this delay. The family court judge considers that the overall quality of reports to court has improved. The judge has commended the high quality of work completed by the court team. Despite some recent improvements in the overall quality of challenges made to poor work, IROs, child protection chairs and managers are not yet consistently ensuring that concerns about case progression and delay are recorded and actioned. In some cases, this means that delay in ensuring improved outcomes for children has continued.
95. As an indicator of increasing confidence, Coventry is now more active on a regional level, including in the development of a regional adoption agency and membership of the West Midlands social work teaching partnership. The local authority has recently been successful in its innovations bid, a bid to improve independent support to children looked after and care leavers, known as 'life-long links'. The joint strategic needs assessment and the children and young people's plan identify cross-borough needs, based on comprehensive data and

analysis. Links with commissioning intentions and actions are less clear. The local authority's children looked after sufficiency statement clearly outlines commissioning intentions in social care. The supporting transformation plan is ambitious, and it demonstrates a broad depth of senior management understanding of deficits and needs, both in relation to provision of better-quality support and provision of services that are more responsive.

96. The authority has invested in a nationally recognised methodology for understanding and management of risk to children. However, although in operation for a year, it is not yet fully embedded. Partner agencies have only recently agreed to jointly use this way of working. This has meant a level of inconsistency in how risk is understood and measured across the partnership. A shared, cross-partnership understanding of risk should contribute to a lessening of the current risk-averse culture in Coventry. (Recommendation)
97. The local authority has struggled to establish and maintain workforce stability in children's services in recent years. There is a legacy of high agency staff levels, high turnover of staff and high caseloads. The director of children's services has sought to increase stability in the workforce with some success. This includes ensuring permanent staff at all senior levels and the implementation of an ambitious recruitment and retention strategy. Recruitment and retention have improved, overall, with turnover of staff at 15.9% in the year to date. The use of agency staff has reduced significantly. Caseloads for the majority of social workers have reduced to manageable levels, averaging 20 cases per worker. Teams are now fully staffed, except for the referral and assessment teams. These teams are significantly challenged by vacancies and recently higher caseloads, partly because of poor maternity succession planning. This has limited social workers' capacity to ensure timeliness of assessments and overall responsiveness. The authority acknowledges this shortfall, and during the inspection it took steps to increase staffing in this area.
98. There is a detailed workforce strategy in place, designed both to attract and retain qualified staff in Coventry. While recruitment has been successful, with 61 new social workers in the last 12 months, this has meant a significant reliance on inexperienced staff. Fifty per cent of current social workers have been qualified for less than two years. The local authority understands the inherent fragility of the current staffing profile and the need to ensure that there is sufficient support for staff in place. The workforce strategy has put in place a greater focus on staff development, including a career progression pathway, a comprehensive training and development programme and competitive salaries. The principal social worker reinforces practice standards and ensures that newly qualified staff benefit from support, including that provided by three practice educators. There is a focus on the continuing development and education of staff with coaching for team managers and an early professional development programme for staff in the second year after qualification. Arrangements are under way with Coventry University to support

a proposed establishment of an assessed and supported year in employment academy.

99. The lead member for children's services chairs the corporate parenting board. Membership is appropriate, and the board is able to demonstrate a broad scope of interest. Although no young people sit on the board, members are active in seeking to hear from young people, including the Children in Care Council, Voices of Care. The board is able to demonstrate challenge to senior officers and impact, including raising the profile and importance of work experience and apprenticeships for those leaving education. It has also been central to a policy decision to exempt care leavers from council tax. The board has access to a range of reports and data concerning services to children looked after and care leavers. This enables members to scrutinise performance on a regular basis.
100. Voices of Care, is championing effectively the voices of children looked after and care leavers. Senior officers and elected members hear their views of current services to children. Young people on the council have taken part in the redesign of services. They have also produced a series of good practice guides for a range of staff, including social workers, managers, elected members and foster carers, which are used to remind those who work with children and young people of the importance of their wishes and feelings. Voices of Care has helped to design the Coventry pledge, which details a set of promises and commitments to children looked after and care leavers. Not all are aware of these commitments, however, and further work is required to ensure that all young people have a copy of the pledge.
101. The authority has a clearly defined complaints process and almost all issues are resolved at an informal level. Very few complaints require a formal investigation, and there has been only one complaint that required a stage 3 independent investigation in 2016–17. The annual report provides brief analysis of the main themes from complaints. Separate action plans arising from complaint outcomes are undertaken, but the annual report does not cover actions taken and completed in sufficient depth to ensure wider learning.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This also includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted.

The inspection team

Lead inspector: Jenny Turnross HMI

Deputy lead inspector: Peter McEntee HMI

Team inspectors: Margaret Burke HMI, Joy Howick HMI, Pauline Higham HMI, Victor Reid HMI, Kate Malleson HMI, John Roughton HMI, Nick Veysey SCRI

Shadow inspectors: Nick Gadfield HMI

Senior data analyst: Neil Powling

Quality assurance manager: Lynn Radley Senior HMI

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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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