

# VOICE OF THE CHILD WITHIN THE OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT

## Summary

Turnover of staff results in some children having to tell their story repeatedly and others not having their voice heard, hindering progress in their care planning.

Some children looked after experience good-quality assessment and effective care planning, resulting in improved outcomes, but this is not consistent for all children. Assessments are not routinely updated to take account of a child's current situation and ongoing risks. The children in care council, despite good work, needs support to increase its membership and influence.

Independent reviewing officers ensure that most children participate in their reviews and challenge other professionals when practice needs to improve, although this is not always effective.

## Ofsted recommendations

7. Ensure that children's views and wishes are consistently gathered, recorded on files and used to inform planning.
  
12. Ensure that support to the children in care council enables effective representation of the views of children of all ages and those placed at a distance from the local authority. This should include work to ensure that the pledge to children looked after and care leavers is refreshed and communicated effectively to all children and young people.

## The experiences and progress of children who need help and attention - (Requires Improvement)

25. The support to children with multiple and complex disabilities is stronger. Children are well supported and their needs recognised... assessments are multi-agency and plans include efforts to gather children's views and wishes to meet them.
  
27. Children's views and wishes are not consistently gathered or recorded on files. For most children, there is evidence of social workers making efforts to engage with them through regular visits, although the frequency is often limited due to high caseloads. The use of direct work tools to aid communication with children or inform planning is not consistent. For some children, even when their views are known and documented, these are not used to influence plans. (Recommendation)
  
30. Child protection conferences and reviews do not include adequate participation or attendance of children and young people. The current system in place to gather children's views is not well used, and not enough children have access to advocates to support participation. Local authority data since April 2016 shows that, of 167 children aged over 11 years, only 31 provided their views and only 13 attended their child protection conference supported by an advocate. The local authority has recognised this and re-commissioned its advocacy service. The new provider started in August 2016, so the impact was limited at the time of the inspection.
  
33. The quality of early help assessments is not consistently good, because of insufficient consideration of the impact of parenting capacity on children, in addition to strengths and needs not being identified for every child or family. The vast majority of assessments reflected views of children, but contained no information or analysis regarding their diversity needs, including children from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## The experience and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence - (Requires Improvement)

Children's reviews mostly take place on time, and good support ensures that the majority of children participate in their review.

52. Visits to children are in line with statutory requirements and social workers are seeing children alone, when appropriate. However, the views of children are not always explicit in decision-making processes and advocacy is not routinely available to help children to express their views.
67. Despite the efforts of a longstanding and dedicated chair, the children in care council has not been provided with sufficient support by the local authority to develop and expand its membership to ensure wide representation from all children looked after. The limited membership prevents the council from informing and influencing effectively the work done with children looked after. Children are not clear of policies that affect them and do not know about the local authority pledge to the children in their care. (Recommendation)

#### **Leadership, management and governance - (Inadequate)**

123. The local authority routinely uses learning from complaints, children's and young people's participation, and peer reviews to inform its strategic planning. However, at the time of the inspection, service improvements because of this learning were still at the planning stage and had not resulted in demonstrably improved outcomes for children.

#### **The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) - (Requires improvement)**

A clear commitment to involving children and young people in influencing board activity resulted in the safeguarding youth forum, established in 2015 which influenced work undertaken on online safety. At the point of inspection, the group was not active due to lack of membership, and as a result young people are not currently engaged in improving safeguarding in Tameside.

141. A Tameside safeguarding youth forum established by the board did some useful work during 2015–16 with regard to updating the board's website and involvement in a pilot in a secondary school concerning safe social networking. Unfortunately, some young people have left the group and consequently it has not met since February 2016. A fresh recruitment process has not yet secured new membership, so young people are not currently involved in influencing improvements in safeguarding in Tameside.
149. A strong section 11 audit process incorporates the voice of the child and ensures that partner agencies produce evidence of their compliance.

#### **Recommendation to the Safeguarding Board**

128. Re-establish effective methods of ensuring that the views of children and young people influence the service planning needed to delivery TSCB priorities and plans.