

North Lanarkshire Council Scrutiny Report

Publication code: OPS-0712-184

June 2012

Introduction

North Lanarkshire Council's social work services are delivered by Housing and Social Work Services.

The Care Inspectorate decides how much scrutiny a local authority's social work services will need by carrying out an initial scrutiny level assessment (ISLA). This considers potential areas of risk at strategic and service levels. We carried out an initial assessment of North Lanarkshire Council's delivery of social work services between November 2011 and January 2012. We did so by:

- Scrutiny of 91 case records, supported by local file readers
- Analysis of 250 documents provided by North Lanarkshire Council
- Reference to SWIA's performance inspection report (published February 2009) and follow-up report (published November 2010)
- Analysis of key published performance statistics
- Reference to the findings of the HMIE inspection of services to protect children (report published March 2011) and the Audit Scotland Best Value 2 Report (published May 2008)
- Participation in shared risk assessment activity led by Audit Scotland, which included all relevant scrutiny bodies
- Reference to intelligence from the inspection of regulated services by the Care Inspectorate in the North Lanarkshire Council area.

The ISLA focuses on answering nine risk questions:

1. Is there evidence of effective governance including financial management?
2. Is there effective management and support of staff?
3. Is there evidence of positive outcomes for people who use services and carers across the care groups?
4. Is there evidence of good quality assessment and care management?

5. Is there evidence of effective risk assessment and risk management for individual service users, both in terms of risk to self and public protection?
6. Does the social work service undertake effective self-evaluation resulting in improvement planning and delivery?
7. Is there effective partnership working?
8. Do policies, procedures and practices comply with equality and human rights legislation and are there services that seek to remove obstacles in society that exclude people?
9. Are there any areas that require urgent attention and improvement?

ISLA findings – November 2011 to January 2012

Based on the evidence available, we assessed that in **seven** of the areas for evaluation there were **no significant concerns** – these were:

- 1. Governance and finance
- 4. Assessment and care management
- 5. Risk assessment and risk management practice
- 6. Self-evaluation and improvement activity
- 7. Partnership working
- 8. Compliance with equality and human rights legislation
- 9. Areas requiring urgent attention and improvement.

We were **uncertain** about the level of risk in **two** areas:

- 2. Management and support of staff
- 3. Outcomes for people who use services and carers

We summarised our initial findings in a report that was sent to the local authority in February 2012.

The Care Inspectorate ISLA Team assigned a **level one** assessment of risk to North Lanarkshire Council's delivery of social work services– "Low risk, good performance and good improvement work."

Timing of scrutiny

Both the level of risk assessed and the size of the local authority determine the amount of scrutiny the Care Inspectorate carries out in a local authority. North Lanarkshire Council acquired a **level one** risk assessment and we carried out proportionate scrutiny activity, comprising 15 scrutiny sessions and observed events, in during March 2012.

Scope of scrutiny

Our scrutiny was targeted and proportionate and did not constitute a full assessment of all social work services. Based on the ISLA assessment we did not undertake scrutiny in relation to the seven areas where there were no significant concerns. What follows is a brief summary of our analysis of the seven areas.

1. Governance and finance

We considered there were no significant risks or areas of uncertainty in respect of governance, including financial management.

Overall performance was good with no significant risks. There was evidence of strong leadership and linkage between corporate and service levels. There was a range of strategic planning initiatives underway, awareness of strategic risks and plans for their management. Financial and resource management arrangements were satisfactory and senior management and elected member scrutiny was supported by an effective reporting process. There were well established performance management arrangements.

4. Assessment and care management

The council performed well in terms of the quality of assessment and care management. The practitioner handbook provided clear and comprehensive policies, procedures and practice guidance on assessment and care planning. Overall the case file reading results were also very positive. Of the files we read 98% had an assessment on file and the quality was evaluated as excellent, very good or good in 77% of cases, with only 19% rated as adequate, and 5% (3 files) as weak or unsatisfactory. Care planning results were also very positive with 91% of care/supervision plans up to date and 80% subject to regular review. The services and care the person received followed the care plan in 85% of the case files we read.

The evaluation of chronologies was an isolated example of poorer results in an otherwise strong performance. The written comments of the file readers indicated that the most common reason that chronologies were evaluated as not acceptable was because they were cut and pasted from existing case notes. The narrative was confined to the time period of the actual intervention and important information, such as traumatic early life experiences and offending histories, was not included.

We fed this information back to the Housing and Social Work Service senior management team (SMT) in January 2012, along with the text of the written comments, which provided helpful context as to why file readers evaluated chronologies as they did. The SMT was already taking action on this issue and was building a re-designed tool on the SWIS system which it hoped would be ready for use by August 2012. Practice guidance had also been updated and a series of half-day practice development events to launch the tool for all frontline staff had been planned for August/September 2012. The Link Senior Inspector will continue to liaise with the council on progress and improvement.

5. Risk assessment and risk management practice

The council performed well in relation to risk assessment and risk management. The file reading analysis reflected that risk was being satisfactorily assessed and managed in most of the cases we read.

Adult protection procedures were in place with the expectation that these were read in conjunction with multi agency procedures. There were also comprehensive procedures for the notification of significant incidents and referrals for significant case reviews. There was a shared approach to risk management endorsed by NHS Lanarkshire and the council, providing a pathway for when a joint risk management approach was required.

There were Draft North Lanarkshire Council Child Protection Guidelines (26 July 2011) in place. The SMT have confirmed that these will be completed, approved and their status as Council policy confirmed.

A Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)¹ memo of understanding was in place. There was good management information on attendance at MAPPA meetings, showing regular participation by colleagues from children and families services, and the health service. There were also joint protocols in place for management of violent, sexual and dangerous offenders in the community. This was a useful, concise, partnership document.

6. Self-evaluation and improvement activity

There was good evidence that the council was committed to meaningful self evaluation and that this activity underpinned improvement planning and delivery.

The continuous improvement group managed the performance framework and reviewed regular audit and performance reports across services. There was evidence that this offered good management information and analysis that linked to improvement objectives. There were also locality-based continuous improvement groups that had developed locality improvement plans in a consistent format. These drew together performance and audit information and evidenced a broad, cross-service approach to improvement through self-evaluation and performance management which included staff and service user involvement.

The capacity of the planning and quality assurance sections had been reduced and the services brought together in an effort to make financial savings during 2011. The service had found the process of producing a Self Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) for the Performance Inspection undertaken by SWIA in 2009 to be extremely useful and had decided to repeat the exercise. This proved to be very helpful for the ISLA process. The SEQ provided the Care Inspectorate with important information about the council's performance and was a useful guide to where evidence was located.

¹ Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) is the framework in Scotland which joins up the agencies who manage offenders. Aimed at promoting public safety and the reduction of serious harm, MAPPA was introduced in 2007 and supports a consistent approach to the management of offenders across all local authority and police force areas.

This was a good example of the council's commitment to self evaluation and will continue to be a useful tool.

7. Partnership working

There was evidence of active strategic partnerships in integrated children's services, health and social care and criminal justice. Joint strategic planning was well developed between the council and key partners such as NHS Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire Council. North Lanarkshire Council was an active partner in the Community Health Partnership (CHP) and there were joint governance arrangements in place.

The North Lanarkshire Partnership (consisting of a range of organisations including council services, NHS services, the police and representatives of service users, carers and the independent sector) had been working together to develop North Lanarkshire's application to the Change Fund² and had developed a Change Plan Template detailing their aspirations in relation to the allocation that had been made.

The Improving Children's Services Group Action Plan for 2010 – 2011 was based on priorities and local outcomes aimed at establishing and developing the GIRFEC³ approach and an integrated framework for children's services. This covered all aspects of the children's plan and was comprehensive, SMART⁴ and detailed key objectives.

North Lanarkshire Council's justice services enjoyed good partnership relations with key agencies such as the police, the Scottish Prison Service, NHS Lanarkshire, the Scottish Court Service and other social work and council services in North and South Lanarkshire. Relatively recent scrutiny and supported self evaluation activity focused on prison based social work and the management and supervision of high risk offenders evidenced that justice services partnerships were performing effectively.

8. Compliance with equality and human rights legislation

There were no significant concerns. Overall the council and the housing and social work service were meeting their statutory duties and providing access to services for the various diverse and potentially excluded communities in North Lanarkshire. The service was alert to the need to ensure that it tackled obstacles that potentially excluded people.

² Reshaping Care for Older People. The Change Fund will enable health and social care partners to implement local plans for making better use of their combined resources for older people's services. The fund will provide bridging finance to facilitate shifts in the balance of care from institutional to primary and community settings, and should influence decisions taken with respect to the totality of partnership spend on older people's care.

³ Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is Scotland's approach to supporting children and young people and requires that services such as social work, health, education, the police, housing and voluntary organisations adapt and streamline their systems and practices and work together, particularly on sharing information. The approach encourages earlier intervention by professionals to avoid crisis situations at a later date.

⁴ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART)

The corporate equality strategy 2009-12 detailed demographic projections and the council's intentions in this area. It focused on public duties under five key themes to deliver on an outcomes basis. Each theme in the report contained key outcomes and achievements. There were good examples of a range of achievements. There was also an associated action plan which identified areas in the strategy that required to be updated.

There was an equality and diversity employment policy, equal opportunity statistical information, an employee handbook and recruitment information. These all contained good quality information on equality schemes and recruitment and employment.

9. Areas requiring urgent attention and improvement

There were no areas requiring urgent attention and improvement.

Scrutiny findings – March/April 2012

2. Management and support of staff

Reason for scrutiny

Overall performance was good but there were a few issues about which we sought greater clarity. In particular the apparent absence of an overarching workforce strategy had impeded our ability to understand the Housing and Social Work Service's approach to recruitment, retention and the balance of the workforce. We wanted to know more about:

- how the council's approach to workforce strategy integrated staff learning and development needs;
- how the distribution of staff across social work services and localities was balanced;
- how vacancies were being managed and if vacancy levels were impacting on service capacity;
- whether staff valued the PRD (performance review and development) process; and,
- how the service responded to results regarding staff morale in one locality in the most recent staff survey.

Scrutiny findings

Learning and development

We met with different groups of staff who all confirmed that Housing and Social Work Services supported creative approaches to learning. They spoke positively about this and cited various examples, including attendance at 'speed networking' events and continuous improvement fora in each of the six localities. The locality fora and individual teams identified training needs, planned events and invited contributors. Examples of events focusing on 'embracing risk' in supporting adults with disabilities, and a joint event between locality children and families staff and the local SCRA⁵ were given. There were also service-wide initiatives on self directed support and welfare reform under way.

PRD

Senior managers explained that the ambivalence expressed by some staff in the 2011 staff survey was a reflection of the stage of development of the PRD process in terms of its implementation across housing and social work services. Some staff were still having difficulty in understanding the new system and their comments in the staff survey had been used to inform improvements in PRD recording processes. We found evidence of increasing understanding and acceptance of the new system when we met with various groups of staff during the scrutiny period.

⁵ Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is a national body focused on children most at risk. It's main responsibilities are to facilitate the work of Children's Reporters, to deploy and manage staff to carry out that work and to provide suitable accommodation for Children's Hearings.

Each locality had a learning and organisational development representative who attended team meetings and worked with and supported staff and the team as required. Team leaders supported action learning processes to help staff formulate team plans. Staff identified their learning objectives via the PRD process and all the staff we met had a PRD. Some were particularly positive about PRD as a tool for appraisal and for reflecting on professional development.

Vacancies

Some staff had begun to notice the impact of the departure of colleagues who had not been replaced. Colleagues had retired or taken voluntary severance. Others had moved on to new career opportunities with other councils and organisations in the normal way, or were supported by the council to move internally, for example to train to become qualified social workers. Staff were clearly now more alert to their services' prioritisation criteria as a result, and were signposting people with lower priority needs on to other more appropriate agencies such as the NHS, education services, voluntary organisations and community resources. Staff said the implementation of GIRFEC had helped with this issue in children's services.

Staff acknowledged that senior managers were trying to protect front line staff and that this approach had been communicated to them. They appreciated honest feedback from managers regarding the impact of budget reductions, for example via the 'road shows' provided by senior managers that took place before the Christmas period in 2011, even if the news was not always good. These events were used to explain that there would be cutbacks and budget pressures. Staff also appreciated feedback from their own line managers, regarding discussions at the management meetings they attended.

Staff in residential services for children said that, following a period of instability during the redesign of services, there was now a stable staff group with low vacancies and sickness absence. They also felt well supported by their managers, got regular supervision and believed their views were listened to.

A recent Care Inspectorate report on regulated services, focusing on the Cumbernauld Home Support Service, had indicated that the service had been adversely affected by staffing issues, including the number of vacancies being carried. The care service had taken steps to address this issue including both temporarily and permanently filling vacancies at Home Support Manager level and the recruitment of Home Support Workers.

Vacancy management

Senior managers confirmed that the current vacancy level was 139 full time equivalent posts. A breakdown of this figure as at September 2011 showed that:

- 65.09 were held to meet turnover and other non budgeted costs
- 40.60 were in the recruitment process
- 22.29 were posts held in services subject to reviews
- 11.10 were a balance of hours from posts

As a proportion of the overall social work staffing establishment of circa 3,500, 139 vacancies was manageable for social work managers. The service maintained a figure of circa 116 vacancies for turnover purposes. The approach to the recruitment and deployment of staff was flexible and decisions as to what posts to fill and when were taken at locality level enabling local managers to plan ahead. Community social work managers met every six weeks to review and co-ordinate vacancy management.

Deployment

Senior managers were supporting flexible arrangements where vacancies could be moved around. Localities were able to loan staff to each other at times of pressure, including having staff work across locality boundaries if required. Housing and social work services were also willing to change the role and nature of posts as demand changed, for example substantial numbers of posts had been changed from non-qualified to social work qualified in order to meet new demands such as increasing numbers of Adult Support and Protection referrals.

Staff acknowledged the impact of this approach, for example they confirmed that the Young Adults Team in Cumbernauld was now all social work qualified. Work was under way to develop a formula to assist decision making on staff deployment, taking account of current and projected demand, and demographic trends. Staff were clear about their roles and how they would develop, and how this linked to their continuing learning and professional development.

Staff surveys

The staff survey results that had reflected lower satisfaction levels in one particular locality had been analysed and acted upon. Each locality had its own action plan and the results of the staff survey had influenced the action plan for the locality in question.

Staff referred to the most recent survey which was distributed at the end of 2011. They were all encouraged to complete the survey. The results were usually shared at the road shows. They said managers were keen to seek views from staff about what they were struggling to deliver and where there were problems.

Future impact of financial savings

Senior managers were confident that there would be minimal impact on front line services in the coming financial year due to the efficiency measures already taken. These included focusing savings on the staff costs of back office and support services such as performance management and quality assurance. However, looking forward to the subsequent three year period (2013/2014 to 2015/2016), projected savings were likely to be in the region of £32m, subject to the new council's priorities. Ongoing service change and improvement, such as continued efforts to shift the balance of care, and to develop re-ablement approaches and self-directed support, should create further efficiencies. However, senior managers took the view that budget reductions on this scale would inevitably impact on service levels and thresholds.

They also acknowledged that working in a climate of budget reductions had an impact on staff perceptions and morale and that it was important to maintain an open dialogue with staff and trade unions. They had used staff road shows as an opportunity to demonstrate to staff that despite the financial constraints, investment in training and organisational development would continue.

Workforce strategy

Although there had been a corporate workforce plan for North Lanarkshire Council submitted as core evidence for SWIA's Performance Inspection undertaken in 2008, senior managers now took the view that to bring together the different workforce strategies (including housing) would be too complex and would not add value.

Although there was no over-arching single workforce strategy for all of housing and social work services, there was good evidence that the key components were in place for each part of the service, e.g. community social work, home care and residential services. Human resources and finance staff had been actively involved in developing these strategies.

Staff learning and development was clearly integrated into strategic workforce planning and following our scrutiny activity we are now satisfied that there are no further uncertainties in this regard.

3. Outcomes for people using services and carers

Reason for scrutiny

Previous scrutiny activity and our analysis of the core evidence provided by North Lanarkshire Council for our ISLA risk assessment had confirmed that, overall, Housing and Social Work Services were performing strongly in terms of having developed an outcome-focused approach to the assessment, planning and care management of people in North Lanarkshire. This well established approach had been successfully delivered since 2008 and more recently the service had introduced an outcome-focused review process to further ensure that a focus on individual outcomes was maintained.

However, there were some gaps in the evidence provided by the council in relation to Risk Question 3, leading to a few areas of uncertainty in relation to outcomes, which merited further investigation during the scrutiny phase. The two key areas were:

- how aware the council was about an apparent drop in performance with regard to the educational attainment and exclusions of looked after children and what action was being taken to address this; and
- how clear was the strategy for services for children with disabilities.

We also wanted to find out more about:

- how many existing adult service users were waiting to move onto individualised budgets and how the Housing and Social Work service was planning to deliver this and to track progress;
- why certain national performance indicators apparently reflected poorer performance in relation to personal life plans and employment for adults with learning disabilities; and
- how the council took forward action to address the issues raised in the annual complaints status report 2010-2011.

Scrutiny findings

Educational attainment of looked after children

The Corporate Parenting Sub group tracked the progress of all looked after children and looked after and accommodated children. The Executive Director of Learning and Leisure Services was aware of all looked after and accommodated children individually and could track their educational performance and school experiences. Education services were developing an improvement tool based on GIRFEC principles as they had known for some time that they needed to improve performance.

There were currently 750 looked after children in NLC. The numbers of looked after and accommodated children (currently 217) were amongst the lowest per head of population in Scotland due to the council's focus on keeping children in the community and away from formal measures, as far as possible. As a consequence the circumstances and experiences of the children and young people who did

become looked after were particularly challenging and were more likely to adversely influence their performance and behaviour in school.

Following the ISLA Report, the council investigated the background to the 'average tariff scores' we used as core evidence. This included discussion with the statisticians in Scottish Government responsible for compiling this data. Only 17 out of the 217 children currently looked after and accommodated in North Lanarkshire met the criteria required to be included in the national data. Significant numbers of looked after and accommodated children and young people who were achieving at school were excluded. The 17 children and young people upon whom the data was based were amongst the most vulnerable looked after and accommodated children. They had traumatic personal histories and challenging social circumstances that had impacted on their ability to sustain school attendance and expected standards of behaviour.

In partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Psychology services, council social work services had undertaken an analysis of the 12 most recent admissions of children under 16 years to NHS psychiatric acute admissions facilities. These were admissions resulting from episodes of acute mental illness that had led to incidents of self harm or suicidal behaviour. A significant proportion of those admitted were looked after and accommodated children and young people.

The Executive Director of Learning and Leisure Services and the Executive Director of Housing and Social Work were able to identify the 17 children and young people in question and provided us with detailed information about their past and current circumstances and progress. The priority had been to keep them engaged with school, and to help and prepare them to cope with being in school. The aim was to support them to achieve stability and derive benefit from their educational experiences that went beyond narrower definitions of academic achievement measured in terms of English and Maths examination results. The approach was based on flexibility, personalisation and choice. We were given a detailed breakdown of the performance and circumstances of each of the children and young people in the group of 17. A similar breakdown was available for all looked after and accommodated children in North Lanarkshire schools.

Role of education and social work staff in supporting children to achieve

Residential and community based social work staff considered that children and young people were being better supported to attain in school. They said there were increased expectations amongst residential staff. They also believed that the regularity of the three-month reviews of looked after and accommodated children reduced 'drift' in children's plans and that the independent chairing of reviews enabled any lack of progress to be challenged.

Various approaches were contributing to improving the educational prospects of these children:

- the outcome focus of Personal Outcome Plans;
- a reduction in stigma towards looked after and accommodated children in schools;

- the development of a shared understanding on the impact of trauma and neglect through shared training; and,
- the use of resources such as Community Alternatives.

Education staff were attending reviews of looked after children and young people when appropriate and social work staff were clear that any communication or engagement issues regarding education were to be escalated up to management. Senior managers acknowledged that some social work staff may have thought education staff should always be at reviews, but they said that this was not always appropriate or necessary.

Some looked after children and young people, for example those who were previously in secure accommodation, were being reviewed monthly. Senior managers said it would not be appropriate for education staff to attend all of these reviews, but the meetings were recorded and outcomes and decisions could be monitored. All senior managers in education services understood the need to prioritise attendance at reviews and those we interviewed were confident that education staff were present when they were required. Social work managers also understood the need to enquire about, challenge and question the direction of travel for individual children and young people.

The children's residential and community based social work staff held largely positive views about the response to exclusion events and also believed that performance was improving. They confirmed that the children and young people they worked with were often very challenging as a result of traumatic experiences and that they needed to be well supported in order to achieve and cope in school.

Residential staff confirmed that since their services were re-designed and the smaller, purpose built houses had become available, they had developed a culture and expectation that children and young people would go to school and would be supported to succeed. Examples given included:

- always asking about homework and any problems in school
- maintaining contact with school staff and alerting them to any issues
- ensuring children and young people had access to quiet space and computers
- ensuring they wore school uniform and supporting them to attend after school clubs.

The young people we met in the focus group we ran for looked after and accommodated children and young people confirmed that they were supported and encouraged to achieve at school.

Measuring and improving performance

Education services had compiled data tracking for examination performance and other achievements, attendance rates and school leaver destinations for all looked after and accommodated children and young people in North Lanarkshire. This data indicated year on year improvements in educational attainment and reducing numbers of exclusions, for all 750 children and young people, both looked after at home and accommodated.

The council routinely gathered a range of evidence reflecting SQA results and wider aspects of achievement including attendance and exclusion figures for all children and young people in North Lanarkshire.

Exclusions

Senior managers acknowledged the need to improve their performance in terms of the exclusion of looked after children. There were 167 exclusion events in 2009/2010. These affected 38 children in total, 16 of whom were looked after children. Every exclusion event had to be reported, tracked and evaluated. The council had taken a broad approach to delivering services designed to support looked after children to develop the skills and resilience required to remain included.

The council had been providing learning and development opportunities to staff in education services and in residential and community based social work settings, focusing on the impact of trauma in the lives of children and young people. Contributions to this had been made by the Violence Reduction Unit and by the Scottish Government's Director of Public Health.

The six locality planning groups (multi-agency groups) were working to the GIRFEC principles. Chairing rotated between staff from education, social work, housing and NHS Lanarkshire. The implementation of GIRFEC was incremental, with a focus on localities and on developing awareness of how to work with children and young people, and how to maintain them in the school setting. Senior managers told us that the "Requesting Assistance Group" was able to come to the school, to support staff to keep children in school and to reduce the number of SCRA reports being generated from school-based incidents. This supported efforts to focus capacity on looked after children and young people.

Pupils attending 'Seven Day Centres' may not have been doing SVQ work but, given that some had previously been in secure accommodation, successful and sustained attendance at these types of resources was considered progressive. Senior managers believed that Courts were gaining confidence in the structured activity on offer and were now more willing to relinquish secure arrangements as a result.

A recent HMIE Validated Self Evaluation exercise evaluated early years provision in NLC as a strength. The council had launched a parenting strategy and had given staff training on attachment and development. They were also looking at developing training on future parenting skills for looked after children and young people.

Resources for keeping C&YP in school

There were a range of measures in place to support attendance and achievement for looked after children:

- children's houses staff were seeking dialogue with education staff to support keeping the child in school;
- education services and school staff told us they used exclusion as a last resort, usually in relation to serious incidents;
- the council had invested heavily in training in restorative practice for education staff and all inclusion base workers had been trained;

- there were champions in all schools and there had been no reduction in staffing to support young people in schools as a result of recent council budget reduction measures; and,
- Community Alternatives staff had been successfully supporting schools to retain children and manage challenging behaviour.

The council had been planning in anticipation of the implementation of the new Curriculum for Excellence for some years. This broad approach had been sustained and was embedded. Senior education managers believed that they had made significant progress over the last 5 to 6 years. The Curriculum for Excellence had relaxed the rigidity around academic focus. They believed North Lanarkshire Council was well ahead on this agenda and had invested in adapting curricular provision to suit the needs of looked after children, for example inviting college lecturers into schools to teach children and young people, promoting the Duke of Edinburgh awards and supporting the innovative NLC Sports Leadership programme.

The role of elected members in supporting looked after children

The elected members we met were clearly well informed and committed to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people in North Lanarkshire. They cited the major capital investment made by the council to improve accommodation for looked after children as an example of this commitment.

The councillors we interviewed felt that there was a considerable improvement in members' understanding of the issues and of their responsibilities as corporate parents. They believed there was excellent partnership working to help improve outcomes for children and young people.

They were disappointed by the figures which we had provided from the national performance data about educational attainment. They were familiar with the data recording process and how many children and young people were included. They were keen to understand the data better and had already begun to consider this with officers. They recognised that exclusions also required further internal scrutiny. They saw this data as providing an opportunity for debate and learning in order to make further improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

Conclusion

We are now satisfied that the council is aware of the need to improve performance in relation to the school experiences of looked after children and young people. The Corporate Parenting sub group of the Children's Services Partnership had identified this as a priority area. The Link Senior Inspector will continue to monitor performance on both educational attainment and exclusions.

Services for children with disabilities

Senior managers responsible for performance management explained that all work with children with disabilities was currently held in locality teams, with some workers' caseloads being primarily weighted towards that role. They intended to change the

point of transition from 16 to 14 years in order to maximise the time available to begin planning and engagement with families.

North Lanarkshire Council was developing a self directed support approach to working with children and was piloting an approach aimed at encouraging children to think about how they would use money provided directly to them to meet their support needs and achieve the outcomes they have identified for themselves.

For new presentations of need, individual budgets were considered. For example, families have used individual budgets to support them to go on holiday with their child but this was not counted as respite and would not be reported as such to Scottish Government for key performance data purposes.

North Lanarkshire Council did not have dedicated social workers working exclusively with children with disabilities. All community based children's services staff had a mixed case load, but teams were divided into working with children under and over 12 years old.

Front line staff working with children with disabilities told us that referrals came through a system that used a prioritisation framework. The framework set out eligibility criteria and was applicable to all care groups. There were four levels, with risk concerns being afforded the highest priority.

Some staff had concerns that the needs of children with disabilities were not prioritised unless there were child protection concerns. They were concerned that children with disabilities lost out in terms of social work involvement due to the need to prioritise child protection referrals. However, senior managers told us that there were no children with disabilities awaiting allocation.

We were told by staff that occupational therapists often carried case management responsibilities for children with disabilities when social workers could not prioritise these children. However, the position of senior managers was that occupational therapists were allocated children with disabilities where their presenting needs could be best identified and met through such a lead professional.

Front line social work staff acknowledged that they had access to specialist advice and consultation on issues regarding children with disabilities, but they sometimes lacked confidence and expertise about working with specific conditions or disabilities with which they were unfamiliar.

The families we met in our focus group said that they believed that the services they received were better when workers had specific knowledge and understanding of the nature of their relatives' disabilities and the challenges they faced as a result.

Each locality had a screening resource group where children's needs would be considered, including children with disabilities. Where services did not depend on an assessment, families and others could access them directly. Any child waiting for a service would be monitored and their family or carers would be provided with clear contact information should they wish to contact the social work service while waiting.

For occupational therapy (OT) services and where a child was not known, for example a child requiring equipment, the referral would be routed through reception services and passed to community care and OT services.

Staff confirmed that a range of training opportunities was available, for example on autism, on self directed support and direct payments, learning disability and sensory

impairment. Staff also recognised carers as a significant and valuable source of information about specific conditions and their implications for the child and the family. They believed it was imperative to see the child first and foremost as a child, and then to consider all their needs carefully, including those related to disability.

Access to services for children with disabilities

Staff and senior managers acknowledged that the impact of GIRFEC was becoming ever more apparent. This had supported the identification and engagement of wider multi-agency support services. Service changes had also been achieved in relation to a migration from more traditional building-based services to more personalised support services, including community resources.

From 2008, two new services had been developed to more appropriately meet the needs of children with disabilities. These were provided by Sense Scotland and Barnardos. Both these services were reaching full capacity. The council increased the funding to SENSE and Barnardos by £500k and these packages were aimed at providing respite.

Partners in Play had also provided a service. Previously, this service had moved from its original remit to become a direct provider of care and support. However, following a review by the council Partners in Play were moving back to providing a brokerage service to make sure mainstream services were accessible and available to children with disabilities and to help link families to these resources. Partners in Play had received 102 referrals from across the North Lanarkshire area for its initial inclusion service.

There was local access to residential respite in Motherwell and staff thought that this was a very useful resource, as part of a wider range of service responses. There had been a period of readjustment when families used to getting regular respite were being offered alternatives. The service was targeted at people with higher needs whose families/carers needed respite in order to go on holiday.

Shared care and short breaks had declined since the service was required to be registered in the same way as fostering services. However, a review of the short breaks strategy was planned to consider the relevance of the service and its place alongside other models of provision. Staff acknowledged that a range of options was required for children in order to meet their needs and to support positive outcomes.

The external provision of services for children with disabilities was being evaluated. The evaluation will include consultation with children and families, as well as staff and partners. A specialist comedy group was being commissioned to broaden engagement with children, a model that had worked successfully during a previous evaluation exercise. The most recent formal report on services for children with disabilities, provided to us as evidence, dated from 2008⁶.

Achieving outcomes for children with disabilities

Some staff said that determining outcomes could sometimes be more difficult for children with disabilities. Some children had life-long conditions and families could

⁶ Development of Services for Children with Disabilities and their Families - Report to the Housing and Social Work Committee from Head of Social Work Services/CSWO – 20 August 2008.

sometimes be resistant to the outcome approach established in North Lanarkshire. However, it was clear that staff were committed to working to identify outcomes and to plan with children and their families about how these could be achieved. There had been a transition from the direct provision of a social work service in response to assessed need, to signposting families on to other services. This was not always welcomed by carers, although generally staff believed this approach was working better and was more suited to achieving personal outcomes for children.

Recommendation

We found it difficult to identify the current over-arching strategy for children with disabilities in North Lanarkshire. We identified a range of factors which, taken together, supported our conclusion that the council should review its strategy, particularly in terms of longer term sustainability:

- Staff expressed mixed views about current assessment and care management provision and the impact of the prioritisation criteria;
- Staff expressed mixed views about their confidence in working with children and young people with disabilities;
- Families and carers also expressed concerns about this issue;
- There were plans to revise the age criteria for transition planning;
- The council was piloting a self-directed support approach to meeting the needs of children with disabilities; and,
- The current providers of services (Barnados and Sense Scotland) were reaching full capacity.

Recommendation 1 – The council should review its strategic approach to meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

Existing adult service users waiting to move onto individualised budgets

Senior managers responsible for performance management knew what the indicative budget was for all service users. At present 160 younger adults had an individualised budget with a support plan that specified intended outcomes. This approach had been applied to new referrals. The next stage was to apply the approach to existing service users. No one was waiting for a service, as they were either new people coming into the service, or they were existing people getting what they had always had.

The council began to engage with external providers two years ago, alerting them to these planned changes. By the end of 2012/13 they will have moved 400 people (in addition to the aforementioned 160) onto individualised budgets. It was the council's view that some providers needed more support to develop a personalised approach. The council had a providers framework which enabled providers to indicate what levels of service they could offer for the individualised budget.

Senior managers anticipated that there would be an aggregate reduction of between 10% and 15% in individualised budgets as they reduced night-time staffing and

increased the use of assistive technology. The council did not intend to assess individual budgets until people had been through a reablement process and its outcome focused review process. The 400 people waiting to move across did not necessarily have higher levels of need than the 160 who were already on individualised budgets, but the costs were higher. However, the council took the view that the rationale for the use of such technology was not just about financial efficiency, but was also about enhancing independence and ensuring that support promoted capacity and control.

The individualised budget approach includes some older people, but this practice had not been embedded yet. The approach will be the same however, using the guided self-assessment and the RAS⁷.

Personal life plans and employment for people with learning disabilities

We met with young people using services and their carers. Carers described their contacts with social workers as helpful and supportive. They said that they, and the people they cared for, had been fully involved in assessment and planning processes and that they had personal living plans and personal outcome plans. One carer of a young man with autism was very positive about her experience of self directed support in terms of meeting her son's needs. The process allowed her to use family members as personal assistants and this particularly suited her son's needs.

The young adults we met were all living at home and were supported by either social workers or support workers from their locality. They all attended college and one was getting work experience and had an appointment for a job interview. They were all happy and said they were well supported.

Senior managers responsible for performance management expressed concerns about the definitions adopted by Scottish Government in relation to gathering data on Scottish councils' performance regarding people with learning disabilities. They believed the criteria adopted by government did not fit with their approach to providing genuine employment, and they did not include data on people in work preparation schemes, attending at day centres or doing voluntary work in their returns.

We are satisfied that the employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities in North Lanarkshire are amongst the best in Scotland. SWIA previously evaluated this aspect of the council's performance very positively and included the council's Supported Employment Service as a good practice example in the report of the performance inspection published in February 2009. We have also included the latest development in North Lanarkshire's approach to supported employment, Project Search, as one of three good practice examples in this report⁸.

⁷ Resource Allocation System (RAS)

⁸ See Appendix 2

Complaints

The senior manager responsible for complaints explained that all complaints were recorded on SWIS⁹. The process was monitored to check compliance with the corporate target that all complaints were dealt with within a 14 day period. The department was currently achieving 96% within the target date.

Generally, these processes were regarded as streamlined and robust. The Senior Management Team received a quarterly report. There was also an annual report to committee, which included analysis and trends.

In terms of results, communication and staff attitudes were the issues most frequently highlighted from the analysis of complaints, often at a fairly basic level, for example staff not returning telephone calls. The largest number of complaints received was about the home care service.

Managers took the view that regardless of whether the complaint was upheld, the circumstances often conveyed important information and insights into service performance.

Council responses took a number of forms. These included changes in and development of policy, for example in customer service, and advice to staff via newsletters, team meetings etc regarding the results, and the responses expected from staff. There was also an expectation that localities would learn from their own complaints and consider this learning when developing their continuous improvement plans. These were monitored by the senior manager responsible for complaints to ensure that this took place.

The council had successfully adapted systems to anticipate dissatisfaction and complaints where there had been significant changes to service delivery, for example in relation to self directed support, where a specific appeals process had been created.

Next steps

The council should consider the contents of this report and provide an action plan to address the recommendation. The link senior inspector will maintain regular contact to monitor progress on the implementation of the action plan. The link senior inspector will also continue to offer support for self-evaluation activity.

Recommendation 1 – The council should review its strategic approach to meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

Information from the scrutiny report will feed into the annual review of the local authority's assurance and improvement plan, co-ordinated by Audit Scotland, as part of the shared risk assessment process.

**Willie Paxton
Senior Inspector
July 2012**

⁹ Social Work Information System (SWIS)

Appendix 1

Number and type of scrutiny sessions

Scrutiny Activity	Number of sessions
Focus groups with people who use services and carers	2
Focus groups with staff	4
Meetings with senior social work managers	5
Joint meeting with senior social work managers and education managers	1
Meeting with Elected Members	1
Observations of events	2
Total number of scrutiny sessions	15

Appendix 2

Good Practice Examples

Self Directed Support

The council had sustained significant progress in developing self directed support in North Lanarkshire. The aim was to offer people choice and control over their support arrangements and their lives. The council continued to develop personalised approaches to achieve positive outcomes for increasing numbers of people.

Support was tailored to the individual's needs in order to achieve the outcomes they wanted, so that they could live more independently. People were allocated an individual budget which was used to fund their support arrangements. The budget could be used in different ways:

- as a direct payment
- as an individual service fund with a provider organisation
- by being supported directly by North Lanarkshire Council

People could choose to have a combination of these options as self directed support recognises people's unique preferences and lifestyles.

Project Search

This project aimed to achieve additional opportunities for paid employment for people with disabilities. The council currently provides a supported employment service to 248 people, with 140 in paid employment. Project Search aimed to develop 8 placements (4 with NHS Lanarkshire and 4 with SERCO) at Wishaw General Hospital. A partnership was established between the council, NHS Lanarkshire, SERCO (who manage the hospital facilities) and Motherwell College. Over the course of a year students rotate through a series of placements offering on the job training and classroom tuition.

Eight students started and completed the 2010/2011 programme with a 95% attendance rate. They learned to travel independently to the hospital and all experienced three placements each. Four students gained paid work before the programme ended and the remainder were all in paid work within six months of the programme's conclusion.

Qualitative outcomes included the individuals gaining more control over their lives, the development of resilience and coping strategies, better relationships with family and the wider community, and being happier and more productive.

Living Nearby

The development of this project was based on the recognition of the difficulties that faced young people when they moved on from being looked after and accommodated by the local authority. Looked after and accommodated young

people are more likely to become homeless, have no job and to experience substance misuse problems. They are also more likely to be subjected to stigma and prejudice.

The aim of the project was to help young people to find suitable housing in an area where the supports they needed to give them a good start as an independent adult were readily available. This entailed securing tenancies for young people that were located close by the residential accommodation in which they had been cared for prior to moving on to independent living – “Living Nearby”. The young people were able to return to their previous residential care accommodation to visit, and to maintain relationships with staff who had been supporting them. Staff were also able to visit the young people in their new tenancies, to help them to settle in and provide ongoing support, advice and guidance.

The aim was to avoid an abrupt dislocation of the young person from residential care services. Many formerly looked after young people experience a sudden end to relationships with people they know and trust as a result of the need to move on from residential care. This can impact on other areas of their lives such as education, relationships and health and well being.

The opportunity to continue relationships in a more natural way meant that staff could continue to offer young people support to develop life skills such as cooking, budgeting, health care, maintaining control of their tenancies and keeping themselves safe. They could also help them to build support networks and access any services they needed.

The Living Nearby initiative won the Scottish Institute for Residential Care’s national award in 2010.