

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Inadequate

Summary

Often, decisions to look after children are not timely or well assessed. Too many children who are now looked after have been left in situations where their needs have not been met or where they have experienced further harm. Decisions to start legal proceedings are often delayed, although once proceedings commence they progress quickly. Very recently, social workers and managers have taken decisive action to protect children who have experienced long-term neglect.

In Slough, there is a lack of targeted multi-agency edge-of-care support to enable children to remain at home or to return home. Where the plan is for a child to return home, the support provided is not consistently robust.

Social workers do not always know children well enough to be able to ensure their needs are met and that their lives improve. Assessments and care plans are often not up to date or do not sufficiently reflect children's individual needs. When children go missing from care or are at risk of being sexually exploited, risks are not comprehensively known, tracked or followed up, leaving these children and young people at risk of further harm.

The virtual school is ineffective and has been for at least a year. The council has not afforded the role of head of the virtual school sufficient status or priority. Children looked after do not receive the support and guidance they need to do well in school. Statutory reviews are regular and detailed, but involvement of children is poor.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are not influential enough in challenging or changing plans for children. Leaders have not helped the Children in Care Council to be as effective as it could be. The views of children looked after are not systematically heard or acted upon and commissioning arrangements for advocacy and the independent visitor service are weak. Local placement choice is very limited and too many children live too far from home.

Although most children move to their adoptive families quickly, some children who are older, have complex needs or who need families together with their brothers and sisters wait too long. Not all child permanence reports are good enough. Some children do not receive life story books at the right time. Letters for later life are detailed but not all are written well. Post-adoption support is a strength.

Support for care leavers is not sufficiently comprehensive or integrated. Too many care leavers do not feel safe, and do not receive the help, advice and guidance they need and are entitled to. This means that they are not consistently safeguarded or empowered to achieve all they are capable of. Pathway planning is weak overall. Care leavers are effectively helped to access employment, education or training.