BEFORE AND AFTER OFSTED: THE EMOTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SENIOR LEADERS WHO RECEIVED AN OFSTED JUDGEMENT OF INADEQUATE

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Submitted for the Degree of Professional Doctorate
in
Advanced Practice and Research in Social Work and Social Care

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

&

The University of Essex

Submitted for examination March 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr David Forbes, Dr Jane Herd and the late Professor Andrew Cooper, for their support, guidance and patience.

I am also indebted to my family and friends, especially Lisa and Sylvia, for their belief in me and their encouragement to complete this thesis, particularly during the many periods when I had self-doubt.

Finally, I wish to offer my appreciation to the participants who trusted me with their stories. Without them there would be no thesis.

Dedicated to the memory of
Julia Janina Barnes
1955–2007

ABSTRACT

This is a unique small-scale study that explores the experiences of senior leaders who received an Ofsted judgement of inadequate. For the first time and through their own words it tells their stories of their lived experience in the period up to, during and post Ofsted inspection. The study frames these stories, which are rich in detail, from both a professional and emotional perspective and draws out the similarities of the experiences of the participants. The study explores the unconscious processes behind the actions and decisions taken and the individual and organisational defences against anxiety. The study lays bare the career defining impact of an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement.

A hybrid of Hollway and Jefferson's Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method was used to capture the participants' lived experience. These were explored using thematic analysis. Further consideration was applied to these themes using psychoanalytic theories and constructs, 'going beneath the surface' to explore the conscious and unconscious processes at play.

The study focused upon outcomes of Ofsted inspections that were undertaken in each English local authority with responsibilities for children's services between 2013 and 2018. The findings are contextualised in relation to how the participants experienced responses to the Ofsted inspection process.

This study contributes to an emerging body of knowledge that goes beneath the surface of the emotional impact of inspection activity for those in positions of responsibility and accountability. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the study points out that responses to a poor inspection outcome can be extremely damaging to managers on an emotional level, with participants outlining feelings of blame, isolation, scapegoating and impotence in the wider organisation and system.

Professionally, almost all participants described their experience of the inspection as career limiting, indicating that they did not wish to expose themselves to a similar experience in the future.

These findings impact directly on how senior managers are recruited, developed and supported in the complex task of delivering safe and effective children's social care services.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADCS:	Association of Directors of Children's Services
ALDCS:	Association of London Directors of Children's Services
LGA:	Local Government Association
Ofsted:	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skill
SIF:	Single Inspection Framework (Ofsted inspection)
ILACS:	Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (Ofsted inspection)
CEO/CE	Local Authority Chief Executive (statutory post – also referred to as the 'Head of Paid Service')
DAS:	Director of Adult Services (statutory post)
DCS:	Director of Children's Services (statutory post)
AD:	Assistant Director
HOS:	Head of Service (senior leader)
Members:	Elected councillors
SMT/SLT:	Senior Management Team/Senior Leadership Team

INTRODUCTION

Framing the Research

This research explores the lived experience of senior leaders in local authority children's social care services following an inadequate Ofsted judgement. It seeks to understand the emergence of emotional factors and how leaders reconcile their experiences, both professionally and emotionally. The period post inspection, once the outcome is in the public domain, is, I would suggest, career defining and career determining for many.

Ofsted award one of four overall judgements following an inspection: outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. What constitutes a poor outcome is subjective and will vary. It is dependent upon several factors, including personal, professional and organisational assumptions and expectations. For example, a poor outcome may be considered as a judgement of 'requires improvement'. However, for the purposes of my study, I focused on an Ofsted inspection judgement of inadequate, which is the lowest grade awarded and will always conclude that there was a failure of leadership, management and governance.

The impact of an inadequate Ofsted inspection for a local authority and its political, corporate and service leaders is profound. Publicly, it suggests that a local authority is not able to adequately safeguard its most vulnerable children. An inadequate judgement also brings additional (and often unwanted) external scrutiny of a local

authority and its politics and priorities. It is the response to all these factors that underpins my research.

The research does not seek to comment on the legitimacy of the inspection judgement, or the methodology adopted within the inspection framework, including the grade descriptors. It does not seek to comment upon the proficiency of the inspectors in undertaking the task.

The findings from this study include the fact that an inadequate inspection outcome can have a devastating impact on leaders. Few people set out to fail. Organisational failure is seldom due to an individual act or omission and rarely attributable to a sole person. However, individuals are often held accountable, and the consequences can be far-reaching. Professional reputations that have taken years to develop and bloom can be left in tatters, careers derailed and lives ruined. There is often a need for something to be done, or more aptly to be seen to be done, to address this failure. A desire to hold individuals to account or apportion blame, takes centre stage irrespective of the impact on the individuals involved.

For some, moving on from failure is not problematic; it is an inevitable part of their career journey. 'Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm',[1] suggesting that success is about developing resilience rather than a specific achievement, and that spending weeks, months or years of self-reproach because of that failure is unhelpful; it is what you learn from the experience of the event that underpins

[1] Broadly attributed to Churchill but found nowhere in his canon – Richard Langworth, Hilldale College Churchill Project.

the ability to move on (Curtin, 2017). For others, however, the impact is professionally and personally significant. It is, I would argue, an understanding of both positions that is the value of this research encompassed in the individual stories of the participants' own journeys.

The genesis of the research is embedded in my own experience as a senior manager who was part of a leadership team in a local authority children's service that received an inadequate inspection outcome. My own journey, described later, has been one where my recovery has been slow and, at times, a painful experience. There have been humiliations, disappointments, self-doubt and self-deprecation, together with periods of anxiety and depression as I wondered what my future career might look like.

An unexpected realisation was the extent to which my identity was attributable to my professional status: the values I hold and the responses I give are very much connected to my career. It was important to me that I was successful and that I could share this success with others. I had worked hard to get to a position of responsibility.

It was clear to me that my professional status faded when I lost my senior leadership position and now that I am no longer in a position of influence. I have questioned the value of my contribution to practice, the support and guidance that I provided to my staff, and perhaps more importantly, the contribution to safeguarding and improving the life chances of children.[2]

[2] A study undertaken in Australia between 2012 and 2014 that explored the professional identities of journalists that had been made redundant found that as professional identity diminished, so did the quality of their journalism practice (Sherwood & O'Donnell, 2016). A similar study (Price, 2000) showed that women with a clear professional identity experienced difficulty adjusting to the loss of their professional role following retirement.

My Story

As described, my interest in the research stems from personal experience. Looking back on some notes I made in the research planning seminars in the early stages of this academic programme, I had recorded the events surrounding becoming aware that I was being asked to leave:

> *I was on a day's leave and I received a call from my personal assistant to say that I had an 'emergency' appointment scheduled in my dairy for early the next morning with HR. After an exhausting day I was not overly perturbed; with 17 years' senior management experience, I was used to 'personnel' issues. The 'personnel issue' turned out to be me. Ten months after an inadequate inspection outcome and four weeks after my new manager had commenced employment, I was sitting in front of an HR colleague discussing my 'exit' from the organisation. It hit me like a bus.*

Ofsted inspection is a process rather than an event. Months, or in some cases years, in the planning and preparation, the period leading up to the inspection was intense.

The period post inspection had been equally challenging and exhausting. Staff had left, new staff had joined.

An external Director of Children's Services (DCS) had been asked to support the development of the required improvement plan (later to be appointed as the permanent DCS), a Department of Education Advisor had been commissioned to comment on the

likelihood of improvement. We had had out first monitoring visit.[3] Internal and external scrutiny and comment became commonplace. It was hard not to be defensive or seek out others to blame.

There were long days and at times sleepless nights. I had given little thought to the possibility that I would not be part of the improvement journey and naively thought my position was safe.

However, it was not until I learnt that my role was to cease that I began to give much thought to inspection as a process that had consumed a significant amount of both my professional and personal space. Over time, it became clearer that my experience was not, as originally thought, based upon one single event. It seemed to me that it was the sum of my experiences, which was my story.

From Manager to Researcher

As the section that outlines my own story suggests, this study is directly located in my own experiences.

At the time that I commenced this period of academic study I was not in employment. I was actively looking for work and had experienced several disappointments at interview in securing a new position. At the beginning of 2018, I commenced a role at a much more junior level than I had been at in the previous 20 years.

[3] A monitoring visit is a short (normally two days) thematic review of progress being made against a local authority improvement plan carried out by Ofsted inspectors that forms part of the statutory monitoring of children's services that have been judged as inadequate. Except for the first monitoring visit, all reports from visits are published on the Ofsted website.

I am mindful that at both a conscious and unconscious level, my experience could potentially influence and prejudice this study, and I have been mindful of researcher bias and the impact that this may have on the validity of the research findings. Making use of the research continuation seminars with peers and discussion in supervision provided forums for discussion and challenge to the data and subsequent analysis.

Developing the Research Questions

The focus of my research was to explore the emotional and professional journey of children's social care leaders who received an inspection judgement of inadequate, and to consider the following questions:

- What is the lived experience of senior leaders who received an inspection judgement of inadequate?
- What is the emotional and professional impact on leaders of a judgement of inadequate?
- How do leaders make sense of their experience?

When I began this study my main research question was ‘what is the lived experience of senior leaders who were displaced (dismissed) following an inadequate Ofsted inspection and how did they recover both professionally and emotionally from this?’ This question was based upon the assumption that senior leaders had been displaced from their positions post inspection outcome, and secondly, their recovery was based upon this experience.

This turned out not to be the case. Some leaders remained in their role, but shared experiences that had similarities to those that were displaced. As a result, my primary research question was changed.

In addition, my supplementary questions focused on the concept of 'recovery'. Following the interviews, it became apparent that 'recovery' is subjective. My own recovery, for example, focused upon regaining my professional position and identity. For others, this was less important. Consequently, my supplementary questions sought to explore how senior leaders made sense of their experience.

My initial research questions were framed using my own position based on my own experience, arguably a distorted view. My hypothesis was that staff who experienced an Ofsted judgment of inadequate were negatively impacted. Whilst this was true, my assumption that it led to displacement was not, hence it was important to consider this further.

Writing in a blog, academic Sue Fletcher-Watson (2020) suggests that it is acceptable to revise research questions as long as the original hypothesis remains true to the original focus of the research.

Value of the Research

In the field of social care, there is no previous research on the emotional and professional impact of perceived leadership failure as a result of an inspection judgement of inadequate compared to other professions (education and health, for example).

Although this is a small-scale study, I feel immense privilege that senior leaders shared their, at times painful, stories with me and, that they wanted their stories to bring focus to future discussions about appropriate training and support for leaders in children's social care and the workforce beyond. It is the uniqueness of these stories, narrated in an open, transparent and honest way that contributes to a growing body of knowledge of the emotional impact of an event that has called into question their professional competence.

Leadership failure within the context of an Ofsted inspection is described in the inspection grading criteria as 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' is likely to be inadequate if any of the practice judgements is inadequate and leaders and managers have not been able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the failure. They have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements' (Ofsted, 2017, p79).

Shoesmith (2016) sets out her own story and the significant impact on both her emotional and professional life in vivid detail following her very public dismissal following the death of Baby Peter in 2007. There was a media-generated public need to hold someone in authority accountable for being unable to predict and prevent his suffering. Similarly, over the years, public enquiries into the tragic deaths of children and the inter/intra-agency accountabilities have explored failures in leadership and governance, but only in a context of what went wrong and how such incidents can be avoided in the future.

Blame, shame and disavowal are the recurrent themes that featured in the interviews. Conscious and unconscious processes are explored to make sense of the experience of the participants.

Examples of enquiries into the experiences of Ofsted inspections in education are more common, but few focus specifically on leadership. More recently, research by Madembo (2018) looks at how local authority organisation's function and survive an Ofsted inspection, including issues in relation to leadership and organisations.

This research, I assert, is unique in that it explores the lived experiences of seven senior leaders through their journey of receiving an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement rather than the inspection process itself. Understanding the stressors of pre-inspection processes and the responses post inspection offer a valuable insight into the complexities of the leadership tasks faced by senior leaders. The Ofsted inspection is an integral part of an assessment of the quality and efficacy of the services that they lead.

Data are collected and analysed using psychoanalytic and psycho-social concepts and theories, which adds to the richness of the study.

Through analysis of the participants' lived experience, the study identifies how children's social care leaders would benefit from more focus on how they are developed and supported in the application of the primary task within the context of the wider organisation.

Deriving from the work on Bion when working with groups (Bion 1962), and later developed by Miller and Rice (1967), the primary task is an activity or activities that is important to or directly related to the main purpose or goal of an individual or organization (Bion, 1961). The primary task of children's social care is to support children and families and to protect vulnerable children.

The study concludes by exploring the key messages from the research and offers some thoughts and recommendations for organisational preparing for, and responding to, Ofsted inspections.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured and presented in six chapters.

The literature review is presented in chapter one and chapter two.

Chapter One: Contextualising Ofsted and its work – A review of the literature. The literature review describes the purpose of inspecting public services and explores the development of social care inspections including the role of Ofsted as the inspector. It looks at the critics of the current inspection regime. It seeks to position the delivery of children's social care services at a time of political imposed austerity. The study also explores changes to the children's social care Ofsted inspection framework and compares the similarities between the SIF and ILACS Ofsted inspection frameworks. Finally, it considers changes to the wider Ofsted inspection landscape in response to Ofsted's most recent research which explored Ofsted's engagement with professionals that it regulates

Chapter Two: Theoretical perspectives. The chapters opens with an overview of the relevant psychoanalytic theory and concepts. It draws primarily, on the work of Freud, Klien Bion and Bowlby and how their theoretical constructs, obtained through clinical psychoanalysis, have been developed to extend beyond the consulting room. It explores social defence mechanisms. I go on to think about the organisational context in which my study is situated, including defining the primary task before offering a view about leadership and professional identity. The chapter concludes with an exploration of accountability and responsibility, anger, and denial and, also how blame and scapegoating permeates organisational life.

Chapter Three: Methodology. The chapter outlines the methodological approach to the study. It explores the overall aim of the study, and the research methods adopted, including the rationale for the design of the study, along with data collection and analysis techniques. It considers the epistemology and ontological positions and explores how participants were recruited, including commenting on the complexities with this and the issues for ethical consideration. The chapter also considers my own circumstances and researcher influence, positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter Four: Findings, including brief demographic details of the seven participants who took part in the research study and an overview of the themes identified that go to the core of the research questions, with the associated extracts from the transcripts. The research focuses on the lived experience of participants through their narratives of the events leading up to, during and post an Ofsted inspection where the outcome led to a judgement of inadequate and considers the internal and external factors that were central to the lived experiences.

Chapter Five: Discussion. This chapter seeks to explore in greater detail the themes identified in Chapter Four and how they assist with an understanding of the overall aim of the research and addresses the research questions. The discussion presents the findings within the context of research and theory.

Chapter Six: Conclusions. Key aspects of the research, implications, recommendations and support networks are considered. The strengths and limitations of the study are explored together with views on future research. This chapter concludes with some final thoughts about undertaking this study.

CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXTUALISING OFSTED AND ITS WORK – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1.1 Chapter Overview

The aim of this literature review was to undertake an objective, summarising and critical analysis of the literature relevant to my study, including that not specifically written for research purposes (Hart, 1998).

The chapter commences with an explanation of the methods adopted to explore the relevant literature, including which literature was considered relevant to my research questions.

I briefly review the evolution of inspection historically over the past 45 years and the drivers for these, which includes a specific focus on the changes to inspections of children's social care local authority services. I briefly comment on the socio-political context, specifically austerity, which was a key factor during the period of my study. An exploration of the Ofsted inspection framework follows, it's development and the emerging criticism of the impact of inspection which includes recent changes introduced to lessen the impact. I reflect upon the criticism of the demands that an Ofsted inspection places on senior leaders, and the lack of acknowledgement of the demands of the inspection process on those being inspected. The value of inspection is explored within the context of improving practice. The chapter draws upon a recently published Ofsted study which specifically asks practitioners to reflect and comments upon their direct

experience of the value of an Ofsted inspection and the impact both organisationally and individually.

The emotional and professional impact of an inadequate inspection outcome is the central tenet of my study and is the thread that pulls together the literature reviewed.

1.2 Literature review methodology

There are two established forms of undertaking literature reviews. The traditional or narrative method seeks to identify a selective range of literature to the subject area that can be summarised. This method is useful when identifying previous research that is specific to the topic being investigated. In contrast, the systematic review method uses a more rigorous and defined approach (Cronin et al, 2008).

I considered the systematic approach to be a more robust method, especially as my initial search did not readily identify material directly relatable to my research topic. The systematic review adopts a two-stage process. Initially, a search is undertaken that identifies relevant studies; the relevance being to the research questions and are considered to emanate from a reputable source. The second stage follows with a more detailed search of the identified studies. Issues of credibility and robustness of the search method are subjected to critical analysis which seeks to determine the validity of the findings and relevance to the research question(s) (Fink, 1998).

Each piece of research was carefully reviewed using the critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) tool. Developed by the Oxford University Public Health Resources

Unit, the qualitative assessment tool provides ten questions which assists researchers critically and systematically appraise the validity of the literature for reliability and relevance to the study being undertaken (CASP, 2021). Where possible and appropriate, primary and secondary literature was compared.

Finally, the review also considered non-research literature. This was often presented by 'experts by experience'. Whilst this literature often provided valuable insights, I was mindful to ensure that it was appropriately weighted as material that had not been subject to academic rigour or scrutiny.

1.3 Searches

The search strategy focused on the use of computer and electronic databases, which offer access to vast sources of information and literature, compared to manual searches (Younger, 2004).

Searches were carried out using keywords – for example 'Ofsted', 'inspection', 'outcomes', 'organisation', 'failure'. However, the use of keywords needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the terms will generate the data being sought. The combination of keywords can yield more results, and many databases operate with commands known as 'Boolean operators', with the most common being 'and', 'or' and 'not' (Ely & Scott, 2007). The purposes are presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Examples of Boolean Operators and their Purpose

Command	Purpose
And	Look for data that include all the identified keywords
Or	Look for data that include any of the identified keywords
Not	Exclude data that contain this specific keyword

(Cronin et al., 2008, p. 40)

Searches were undertaken using the Tavistock and Portman library 'discovery' service, which allows searches using keywords, author or title information of the numerous databases accessed through the library. In the main searches keywords were used with the Boolean commands above. A search of the British Library thesis depository – EThOS – was undertaken using the same methodology.

In addition to the use of research databases, more generic searches were undertaken using search engines such as Google and Google Scholar, which produced access to a range of non-academic articles. Results were divided into themes and categories, which allowed both theoretical and research literature to be integrated (Carnwell & Daly, 2001).

1.4 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Searches were undertaken using the following inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only literature that was credible and relevant to the research questions were critically analysed. Initially, the criteria were applied using a small number of factors.

However, this was later extended as it became apparent that primary research did not exist that addressed the primary research question.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria included:

- Use of primary and secondary research which considered the impact of inspection on senior leaders.
- Non-academic literature was included where is could be evidenced that this material added value to the points being made. Despite extensive searches, I was only able to identify a small number of peer reviewed academic literature that is specifically related to my study and research questions. Non-academic comments from professional bodies added significant insight to my study.
- Quantitative research was excluded. My study did not seek to use individual local authority quantitative data in relation to performance, although I acknowledge that this data is one of a range of considerations that Ofsted use.
- Non-UK studies were included when considering the themes that emerged following the thematic analysis of the participants narratives. My study uses psycho-social concepts and theory from both national and international scholars and clinicians.
- Only inspections undertaken by Ofsted were included when considering the impact of inspection on senior leaders. It is important to note that Ofsted only inspects children's services in England. Scotland, Northen Ireland and Wales have separate inspection arrangements particular to each country. These frameworks differ in scope.

1.5 Findings

Searches did not yield any directly comparable data to the research question. However, there were data available that relates to Ofsted inspections within educational settings, together with data that supported the individual themes identified and discussed in Chapter Five.

There is, however, an absence of research that explores the emotional impact as social care leaders navigate their way through a formal inspection process that leads to a judgement of inadequate.

This study seeks to empirically address the lack of specific literature that explores the lived experience from an emotional and professional perspective of senior social care leaders who experienced an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement. A body of literature that encompasses the fear of failure from practitioner to manager, is beginning to emerge, and whilst not specific to my study, amplifies the challenges faced in contemporary practice (Armstrong & Rustin, 2018., Finch & Schaub, 2018).

1.6 From Central to Local Government: The Delivery and Accountability for Public Services

My review starts, purposely, by thinking about the history of inspection. Inspection is driven, I would suggest, by a need to 'hold to account' those delivering public services to an often changing, set of social and political expectations, ambitions and societal values and demands.

The inspection and audit of public services is often thought to be a relatively new phenomenon. However, it is known that inspection of services delivered to the public can be traced back to the eighteenth century with government-funded inspections of prisons in Ireland (Rhodes, 1981).

The number of external inspections of core public bodies increased from the mid-1970s from 57 to 67, during the period 1976 to 1995 (Hood et al., 1998). Davis et al. (2001) asserts that the increase in the number of external inspections was due to a combination of factors, which were driven by a 'crisis' in public spending in the 1980s.

The emerging concept of 'value for money' from public services was a result of the view that internal evaluation and responsibility among professionals delivering such services were not sufficient to protect users and taxpayers. It was asserted that there was a need to introduce processes for monitoring and controlling public services during the increasing shift towards privatisation and market forces.

In 1996, Wilcox and Gray, discussing school inspection and holding schools to account, comment that in the early 1990s, the government, under the premiership of John Major, focused on a charter policy that clearly set out the notion of accountability in public services. Inspectorates were given a key role in ensuring that 'the professional services are delivered in the most effective way possible and genuinely meet the needs of those whom they serve' (p. 29).

Davis et al. (2001) suggests the need for central government to retain some form of control of the services that they once had direct responsibility for the delivery of. It

was argued that the move to decentralised and devolved services with local autonomy and accountability heightened the need for external inspection.

In exploring the role of inspection of public services further, Davis et al. (2001) asserts that a change of government in 1997 (from Conservative to Labour) did not dent the enthusiasm for external inspection. It saw a rapid increase, between 1997 and 2001, of inspection, audit and associated regulatory activity as Labour sought to modernise public services and how they were delivered.

It is argued that inspection was seen as a diagnostic tool that could be utilised to weed out or impose ministerial intervention on failing services.

> Inspection was (and is) promoted as an independent activity to safeguard both taxpayers and service users. It is suggested that the public now sees themselves as consumers of, rather than users of services and that performance information supports this 'contracted' relationship. Successive governments have promoted audit and inspection as a vehicle by which the public can judge the quality and efficacy of public services, which in turn drives up performance and quality. (Davis et al., 2001, p. 3)

Power (1994) questioned audit and inspection, claiming that it had become central to government policy and control. She further suggested that there was limited evidence that it could be shown to have influenced sustained improvement, asserting that instead it often led to increased scrutiny through additional audit and inspection activity.

Bailey (2013) comments that there is a clear connection between neoliberalism, governmentality and the ‘technologies of performativity’, saying that:

> Government is not only the governing of conduct by the state, but also includes the myriads of agencies…. which are able to direct and manipulate the conduct of others. (Bailey, 2013, p. 816)

Politically, Labour came to power, with a significant majority of Members of Parliament, in 1997 following 18 years of a Conservative government. Labour, keen to distance itself it’s socialist roots and from previous failures to engage with the public, rebranded itself as ‘New Labour’ under the leadership of Tony Blair. It introduced a far reaching manifesto titled ‘New Labour, New life for Britian’ which was described as the new ‘Third Way’, centrist approach to policy (Bevir, 2009, pp. 351-366). The general theme that the "loony left" label suggested was twofold, and Labour Party local government authorities were perceived to be: Irrationally obsessed with minority and fringe issues. Paranoid about racial and sexual "problems" that were wholly imaginary on their parts, without actual substance. Labour’s ‘third way’ was to present a ‘middle ground’ position that may be more appealing to the majority of the population that did not lean toward either the stanch socialist or Conservative capitalist ideologies.

Prior to the general election in 2010, the Labour government had an extensive programme of reform for children’s services under their umbrella policy entitled ‘Every Child Matters’ (2003), which was in response to the enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) and built upon the earlier comprehensive programme of reform ‘Quality Protects: Framework for Action (1998)’. This framework for action aimed to

improve the public care of children by setting local authorities a number of managerial and effectiveness targets (Weissman, 1999). These far-reaching agendas, initially, came with additional resources to support implementation. The Children Act 2004 made the necessary legislative changes to support this work programme.

It is my view that whilst a number of these reforms were long overdue, they had unintended consequences. Firstly, the Quality Protects programme had substantially increased statutory quality assurance functions through the creation of specialist posts such as independent reviewing officer and child protection conference chairs. These posts appealed, in my experience, to experienced social work practitioners who saw these roles as an opportunity to move away from front line practice. Secondly, the death of Victoria Climbié and subsequent enquiry (Laming, 2003), seemed to have an impact on new entrants to the profession leading to recruitment difficulties. The death of Peter Connelly in 2007[4] did little to improve the reputation of children's social work as a profession, and in my view, only further exacerbated the recruitment difficulties. Thirdly, the reforms introduced throughout the period were process driven. The prescriptive nature of these processes with onerous administrative requirements to demonstrate compliance, diverted practitioners from meaningful engagement with children and their families. It was apparent that staff who remained in front line practice were demoralised. Munro (2011), in her review of child protection practice, reinforced this view.

Inspection is politically driven. It is directly driven by political ambitions and priorities of the government in power at the time. As already described, the history

[4] Peter Connelly died in August 2007 aged 17 months of age, following abuse by his mother, her boyfriend and a lodger at the family home. Peter suffered more than 50 injuries. He was known to children's social care and other agencies having been seen by professionals 60 times in the final eight months of his life.

suggests a process by which central government distances itself from having direct responsibility for the quality and efficacy of the services provided but can 'allow' itself to pass comment. Fundamentally, it charges others with the provision of a crucial state function but at the same time distances itself from ensuring that the service is properly funded and executed.

Froggett (2002) makes an important observation in relation to the increase in the number of regulatory bodies from the eighties in support of successive Government social policy modernisation agendas. She states that this often promoted as required to guarantee better quality services. This 'top down' model of governance imposes heightened levels of accountability of local government elected members, managers and officers (p. 129).

It would be hard, not to conclude that inspection has, in some public services, become integral to its operations with frequent inspection activity central to external evaluation as a means of control. The examples illustrate a need for central government to retain arm-length power and influence. Inspection and audit activity has developed as a vehicle to measure public policy initiatives. Inspection outcomes, I would assert, are often used negatively as a political tool that seeks to highlight political differences rather than tangible appraisals of the services and interventions provided.

1.7 Austerity, Politics and Service Delivery Post 2010

In the 2010 general election, Labour was defeated, although there was no overall winner, and the Conservatives needed to enter a coalition with the Liberal Democrats to form a working administration. Immediately they announced a package of austerity measures that they argued were necessary due to the state of the UK's finances and level of government debt. Commenting on ten years of government-imposed austerity, Toynbee and Walker graphically highlight the impact – not least the challenges to local authorities providing statutory services (Toynbee & Walker, 2020). The article argues that demand for local authority services have increased, yet funding from central government has decreased year on year, meaning that authorities are struggling to meet their basic statutory responsibilities.

From my own experience in the period leading up to the inspection, although some savings needed to be made, budgets were largely protected. This position was confirmed in a report by the Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education (Sulke, 2016, p. 15) following an inadequate inspection outcome. However, what was absent, in my view, was any real growth to meet the increasing demand and complexity. As already described, there was also a rapidly expanding recruitment crisis for front line social workers arguably from 2004 onwards. Crucial safeguarding roles were filled by more expensive locum practitioners. Locum work, with higher rates of pay and an ability to move roles more easily had become attractive to many children's social workers, with local authorities having no option other than to pick up these costs. Having front line posts unfilled, a position I related to, was not an option for senior managers: we could not take the risk.

It is also of note that almost every local authority that has received an inadequate judgement has reported a significant increase in expenditure following the inspection to enable improvements. Again, Sulke (2016), in her report, highlighted an injection of funds of £5m to support improvements.

Similarly, Puffett (2018) quotes Colin Green, a children's services consultant and former DCS, who stated: '[N]early all councils judged inadequate have spent millions more, not least on more social workers to reduce caseloads, so their social workers can do a better job.' The tenet of his comments is that often children's services fare better financially because of an inadequate inspection judgement than perhaps they would have done with a better inspection outcome.[5]

Social care services are, by definition, needs led. Need in this context is inherently difficult to predict in absolute terms, with several factors that may increase demand. It is asserted that austerity is one of the main contributors to an increase in the number of children in need and a reduction in support services. In an article published on the Social Policy Association website, Churchill (2018) points out that between 2010 and 2018, funding from central government to local authorities decreased by almost 50%. She suggests that the reduction in funding meant that councils had to focus their resources on meeting the immediate statutory responsibilities for child protection and looked-after children. Services for children in need, particularly those aimed at diverting children from statutory children's social care provision, were significantly reduced. She argues that throughout this period, the number of children living in poverty increased, with reduced

[5] In the same article, Andrew Webb, a serving DCS, also criticises the cost for councils of the inspection process, claiming it is 'phenomenally wasteful of scarce resources'.

access to both local authority and allied services in health and education, which supported the belief that early identification and provision of help was severely curtailed.

It follows, I would suggest, that increased demand and decreasing resources in some authorities added an additional dimension for senior leaders, with limited resources being diverted to meet statutory obligations.

My research explores inspections that were undertaken in the period 2013–2018. I do not seek to draw any direct inferences in relation to austerity or demand as it will be highlighted that neither was unique to only those local authorities that received an inadequate Ofsted judgement. Notwithstanding, leaders were operating within a challenging environment, which may have distracted them from their primary task.

1.8 Inspection of Children's Social Care

Until 2007, when Ofsted assumed responsibility for the inspection of some elements of children's services, taking over complete responsibility in 2009, inspection of the totality of a local authority's social services was undertaken by a regulatory regime that included both adults and children. It is my assertion that the separation of adult and children's services fails to recognise how 'need' does not cease to exist when a young person reaches the age of majority. Services often need to cross generational divides to be effective. Inspection of children's services will often need to consider services provided to parents and carers to meet their needs, for example mental health or drug and alcohol services, which under current arrangements sit outside of the control of the combined leadership for total social care provision.

In 1985, the most notable of these regimes, the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), was formed, replacing the Social Work Service (SWS) of the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), established in 1971. The SWS was itself an amalgamation of the Children's Inspectorate of the Home Office and the Social Work Division of the DHSS, both of which can trace their histories back to the nineteenth century (Davis et al., 2001).

In 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), a non-departmental public body, was created to become the single, independent inspectorate for social care in England (source: https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2007/11/15/history-of-csci/:). Its sponsor department was the Department of Health of the United Kingdom government. It incorporated the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). The Commission brought together the inspection, regulation and review of all social care services into one organisation. It was created by the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 and became operational on 1 April 2004. The Commission received financial support from the Department of Health and raised part of its running costs by charging regulatory fees. From 1 April 2007, the regulation of Children's Services (Fostering and Adoption Agencies, Boarding Schools and Children's Homes) no longer fell within the remit of the CSCI. These functions were then carried out by Ofsted. The Commission was abolished on 31 March 2009 and was succeeded by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted.

Prior to the formal abolishment of the CSCI, legislation was introduced in 2004 (the Children Act 2004) that also included the transfer of the regulation and inspection of

children's services by increasing the remit and responsibilities to the already established education regulator, Ofsted.

1.9 Ofsted and Children's Social Care Inspections

The Office for the Standards in Education (Ofsted) was created in 1992 with responsibility for the inspection of education provision in England, replacing the Education Inspectorate, which was originally set up in 1840 as a central government department charged with assessing and improving academic standards. Ofsted's remit was expanded in 2007 to include children's services work relating to social care and the courts, and its full title was changed to reflect this and it became known as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, although the acronym remained as Ofsted.

Following the tragic death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 and the subsequent public enquiry that reported in January 2003 (Laming, 2003), primary legislation was introduced that dissolved combined adult and children's social services departments. This created children's services, amalgamating children's social care and education and creating the statutory roles of a Director of Children's Services and Lead Member and revised inspection arrangements (Children Act 2004).

Ofsted was already an established inspector of education services that was used for inspection activity at scale and fitted neatly with the new children's services departments and responsibilities, with limited organisational set-up requirements needed.

On a practical basis, the desire to ‘join up’ local authority children’s services meant that Ofsted as an inspection authority was a natural bedfellow.

In 2013, Ofsted started a programme of local authority children’s services inspection. For the first time, this new inspection brought together all previous elements of separate inspections under a new framework, aptly named the ‘Single Inspection Framework’, often abbreviated as ‘SIF’ (final update: Ofsted, 2017). In addition to combining previous stand-alone inspections, this new framework also changed the second-poorest inspection outcome from ‘adequate’ to ‘requires improvement’(the current inspection grades are highlighted in the introduction). Among other changes, this ‘new inspection’ relied less on data and introduced the concept of exploring a child’s lived experience to predict possible factors that would lead to improved positive outcomes. The methodology used was direct communication between the inspector and practitioners to identify how well they know their children and the quality of these relationships. Underpinning practice was the quality of support and supervision provided.

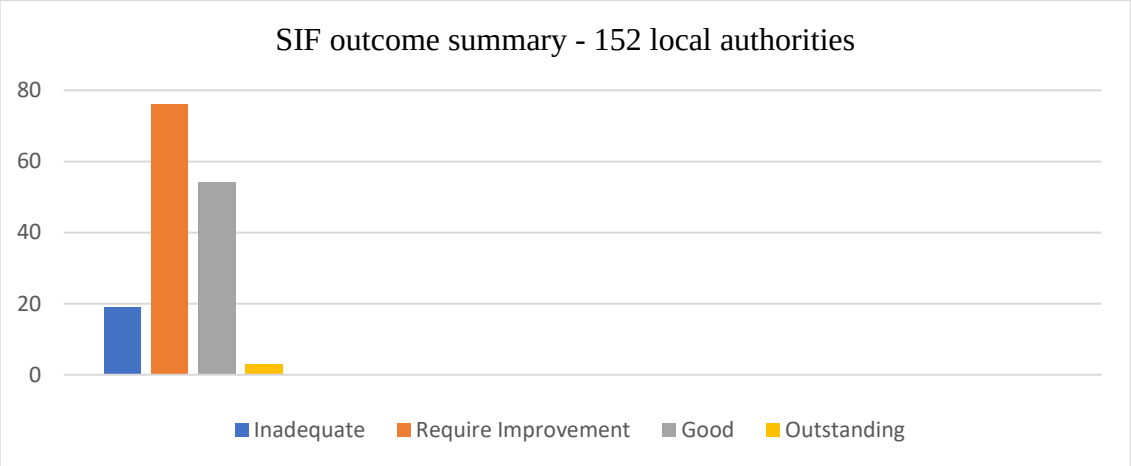
Whilst leadership had been a feature in previous Ofsted, CSCI and SSI inspections, there appeared to be a new focus on what constitutes good leadership. Judgement criteria were published (Ofsted, 2017, pp. 27–30) with, for the first time, clear confirmation that where any of the main judgements were inadequate, the leadership judgement and overall judgement would also be inadequate. Among the 19 local authorities judged inadequate, each of these local authorities also received an inadequate judgement for leadership, management and government (source: ADCS.org.uk).

Through observation and personal experience, it seems that there has been a shift from ‘corporate’ to individual responsibility. The concept of individual responsibility and what this may mean for senior leaders, is a key finding from the study.

By the time that all local authorities had been inspected in December 2018, only 38% were delivering services that were good or outstanding. More significantly, 13% (19) of all local authorities were inadequate (source: ADCS.org.uk). The Ofsted terminology, within the SIF guidance for describing practice areas that are considered inadequate, is ‘there are serious and widespread failures’ (SIF final update: Ofsted, 2017, p. 11).

Table 1

SIF Outcome Summary



Source: ADCS.org.uk

Table 2

SIF Outcomes – Overall Effectiveness

Judgement	**Count**	**Percentage**
Outstanding	3	2%
Good	54	36%
Require Improvement	76	50%
Inadequate	19	13%

Source: ADCS.org.uk

1.10 The Value of Inspection: Ofsted's Role in Improving Outcomes

It can be argued that ultimately the value of inspection of children's social care services is whether this activity improves the life chances of vulnerable children and young people by keeping them safe through a range of interventions designed to support them and their families. If inspection is a key driver to achieve these outcomes it would be hard to not conclude that the value of inspection outweighs any disruption caused by the inspection activity.

An exploration of the value of the current inspection arrangements for children's social care starts with Ofsted. In essence, Ofsted considers, as highlighted its organisational tagline, that its primary function is 'raising standards, improving lives', through a process of inspection activity. It is, unsurprisingly, confident that its work delivers against these objectives. However, as will be described later, some commentators have suggested that this does not come without cost. This is a view that I have some sympathy with.

In 2022 Ofsted published its revised strategy for the period 2022 – 2027. In states that its overarching aim is to 'improve lives by raising standards in education and children's social care' (Ofsted, 2022, p. 3).

It describes the guiding principle as:

> 'We are a force for improvement through the intelligent, responsible and focused use of inspection, regulation and insights (Ofsted, 2022, p. 5)

Thus, whilst Ofsted view their work as leading to improved standards, they stress that they should not be viewed as an improvement agency. According to them 'improvements are made by teachers, leaders, social workers and others who work on the ground – but our inspection, regulation and insights contribute to these improvements' (Ofsted, 2002, pp. 5-6). Perhaps, most critically, later they define 'responsible' as:

> 'Understanding the perverse incentives and unintended consequences our work can have, and minimising those as far as possible. Regulators and inspectorates should be proportionate and seek to avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on those they regulate and inspect'(Ofsted, 2022, pp. 5-6).

It is my contention that there is an inherent contradiction that flows from their description of their work being a 'force for improvement' and being 'responsible'. I would assert that Ofsted hold significant power. They are significant actors in determining the direction of travel especially for local authorities who receive a judgment of inadequate, through their post inspection monitoring activity, which go further than 'contribute' to an improvement journey. A musical analogy would see them as the

conductor of the orchestra rather than a principal musician. Secondly, I would suggest that it is naive to believe that Ofsted are not fully aware of the consequences of inspection, what it may mean for senior leaders, and the burdens it imposes on those they inspect. I accept that there is an unavoidable reality to the unintended consequences and that inspection activity, if it is to be meaningful, may need to distance itself from these consequences. It is difficult to see how consequences can be minimised when the inspection framework is rigid and does not allow for a more flexible approach.

The latest annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (Ofsted, 2023) makes claim that the overall picture of the impact of inspection is one of improvement, with the Chief Inspector commenting that Ofsted 'aim to raise standards and improve lives, and I am confident we do that. I firmly believe that our independent scrutiny is of huge benefit to the education and care sectors and to the children and learners we all serve'. (Ofsted, 2023, p. 5).

Ofsted reports that the percentage of local authority children's services with an Ofsted judgment of good or outstanding (under the revised ILAC's inspection framework) was 60 per cent (April 2023) compared to 38 per cent at the conclusion of inspections using the SIF in 2018. The number of local authority's judged inadequate had reduced from 15 per cent in 2013 to 8 per cent in 2022. This percentage decrease is not insignificant and Ofsted have cited that there is a clear link between inspection activity in individual local authorities, improved performance and subsequent improved Ofsted judgements in future inspections, however, there is currently insufficient research to either support or reject this assertion. Nonetheless, it is clear, from my own observations, that there is a greater focus following an inadequate Ofsted judgement, with

activity geared towards achieving a more positive inspection judgement at the next inspection.

1.11 Criticisms of Ofsted

Ofsted is not immune to criticism. Individual criticism of misrepresentation, bias, inspector incompetence and/or poor contextual understanding of operational difficulties is not uncommon. There is also a body of collective criticism that focuses on the lack of evidence that inspection drives improvement (Shaw et al., 2003, Rosenthal, 2004, Bousted, 2020), and on the emotional toll of the whole inspection process for those involved (Jones, 2015, Puffett, 2018).

A study in 2003 explored whether Ofsted inspections of secondary schools make a difference to GCSE results (Shaw et al., 2003), concluding that inspection on its own did not improve examination achievement.

Research published in 2004, which explored whether inspection improved the quality of education in schools, concluded that there was no empirical evidence that inspections improved examination achievement. The research, however, suggested that there exists a small but not insignificant adverse, negative impact on examination results in the year of the Ofsted inspection (Rosenthal, 2004).

Klerks' (2012) academic paper presented at a conference in the Netherlands suggested that no evidence across Europe had been found that school inspections automatically lead to an improvement of the educational quality. However, there is

evidence that the verbal feedback at the end of the inspection visit and the written inspection report were of value and well received.

In 2018, the National Audit Office (NAO) presented a report that considered whether there was evidence that Ofsted (through inspection) was effective in driving school improvement. The NAO concluded that Ofsted was unable to provide evidence that its activities were having the intended impact and, perhaps more importantly, Ofsted did not have a robust framework by which others could judge how well it delivered support for improvement (NAO, 2018).

Bousted (2020) writes that Ofsted has no evidence, other than rising percentages of schools being awarded positive Ofsted grades, to support its assertion that inspection 'raises standards and improves lives', suggesting that the inspection framework is fundamentally flawed (p. 433).

In relation to children's social care, empirical evidence is less well developed. In 2007, Ofsted reported: 'Although the direct impact of inspection can be difficult to prove, there is evidence that inspection and regulation make a positive difference to the provision of services in education and care.' The report further states: 'It is also true that, in places, inspection has not made enough difference' (Ofsted, 2007, p. 2).

An article in *Community Care*, written by leading social work academic Ray Jones, is scathing in its description of the Ofsted inspection activity of local authority children's social care services. In the article, he suggests that 'Ofsted now feels like the Spanish Inquisition: turning up with no notice, presuming poor practice and guilt – which

must be hunted down, flushed out and admitted by the inspected'. Later he states: 'Ofsted has become a hit-and-run inspectorate – creating crashes wherever it turns up, leaving a trail of trauma and turmoil, hastening to move on, and not looking back. It doesn't recognise the practice chaos and professional carnage it leaves in its wake', arguing that by its own admission reported in annual reports, 'children's social services are deteriorating with its interventions and under its watch' (Jones, 2015).

Puffett's (2018) article published in *Children & Young People Now* quotes an interview with Andrew Webb, Stockport Council's Director of Children's Services and former president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). They (ADCS) remain unconvinced that the framework is a reliable way of appraising children's services. It is asserted that the various inspection frameworks used or proposed for inspections of local authority children's social care mean that the methodology of the SIF, its predecessor and its replacement is sufficiently different to "render meaningless" any attempt at comparing the performance of a single local authority or local safeguarding system over time.

A study published looked at key performance data, deprivation and expenditure across eighty-seven local authorities in England concluding that there was little evidence of better or worse performance with different Ofsted ratings. There was, however, stark differences based upon local deprivation with more deprived authorities most likely to have a poorer Ofsted rating. They also found no direct correlation between expenditure and the Ofsted rating (Wilkins and Antonopoulou, 2019).

Research exploring the impact of Ofsted on performance in children's social care painted a mixed picture, with similarities to that found in the education sector, ranging from rates of statutory intervention increasing during the year in which the inspection takes place in those authorities that received an inadequate judgement to a small dip in rates in authorities receiving a good or outstanding judgement. Of more significant note is the reputational damage of a poor inspection outcome, while workforce stability issues can hinder the ability of these authorities to recover (Hood & Goldacre, 2021).

Madembo's (2018) study of how local authority organisation's function and survive an Ofsted inspection. Whilst she concludes that inspection has a role in ensuring a focus on the quality of services and interventions, this comes at a cost, and she argues that the primary task of the provision of safe and effective child protection services becomes secondary to the focus on the preparation for, or recovery from, an Ofsted inspection.

My observations, as a senior leader in an authority that was judged to be inadequate by Ofsted, accord with many described already. The SIF inspection framework felt very different from previous inspections in both the intensity of activity in the period leading up to the inspection and in the period post inspection. The proportionality of preparation for this new style of inspection did not seem to align with the day to day primary task. Post inspection the workforce became destabilised, with many front line practitioners seeking alternative employment. There is anecdotal evidence that in the immediacy of an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement, practice becomes more risk adverse with no evidence that this improved the life chances for children or kept them safe. I would concur with these observations.

Defences against the anxiety of being perceived as non-compliant come to the fore at all levels within the system to the point that the organisation struggles to perform the primary task but compensates by introducing a range of secondary tasks designed to meet the requirements of Ofsted (Menzies, 1959).

1.12 Post SIF: Changes to the Inspection Framework

Despite the relative infancy of the Single Assessment Framework for Ofsted inspections introduced in 2013, the following year Ofsted consulted widely on its proposals to introduce a revised inspection framework. This was to be delivered in collaboration with other statutory inspectorates, known simply as integrated assessments. This consultation also included a small number or pilot inspections. In February 2015 Ofsted, on behalf of its fellow inspectorates, published a response to the consultation and evaluation of the pilots for Integrated Inspection. It was concluded that the 'methodology used in the pilots did not add enough inspection value to enable a proper multi-agency evaluation of services for vulnerable families, children and young people living in that local authority area'. (Ofsted, 2015, p. 7).

Instead, Ofsted announced that the inspectorates would work together to devise a programme of truly joint inspection looking at targeted areas of practice either by theme or locality. These targeted inspections will evaluate how local agencies work together to protect children. In 2016, Ofsted and its partner inspectorates launched the Joint targeted area inspections (JTAI). These inspections are undertaken by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation). The

inspections are thematic and driven by local intelligence and data to focus on the arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection in local authority areas in England. (HM Government, 2016)

In 2022, the joint inspectorates issued new guidance for two types of JTAI. One type will evaluate the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk (or the 'front door' of child protection). The other type will look at a particular theme or cohort of children, the first of which will focus on the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children. (HM Government, 2022a, HM Government, 2022b).

In 2018 Ofsted commenced inspection using a revised inspection framework – Inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) which has been in the planning since the decision not to proceed with the intreated assessment framework (Ofsted, 2017).

Many of the features of the SIF inspection framework remained. There were, however, some significant changes. The revised framework formalised several initiatives designed to create 'a proportionate inspection process based on intelligence gathered throughout the year' (Ofsted, 2019, p. 3). Ofsted described the revised framework as a move away from a universal four-week assessment to a tailored inspection which includes:

- Annual self-evaluation completed by the local authority.
- An annual engagement meeting between Ofsted and social care leaders in the local authority using the self-assessment as the focus of the discussion.

- Focussed visits carried out by Ofsted inspectors over two days that are thematic.
- Monitoring visits of local authorities with a current inspection outcome on inadequate. These visits are like the focussed visit but are more frequent.
- Joint targeted area inspections (JTAI's).
- The introduction of a short (one week) inspection for local authorities whose previous inspection had an overall grade of good or outstanding and standard (two week) inspection for authorities with a requires improvement or inadequate judgement.

The revised framework had at its core a greater focus on social work practice with inspectors spending much more time directly observing practice and talking with social workers (Ofsted, 2019, pp. 3-4). I share a view that this revised framework, which expands upon the SIF framework, offers an opportunity for a more balanced assessment of the quality and efficacy of services provided. It can be more proportionately applied to better performing authorities by the use of 'short' or perhaps more aptly described 'judgement maintenance' inspections. Whether short inspections will reduce the demands on local authorities remains unclear.

Notwithstanding differences between the SIF and ILAC's inspection framework, the revised framework maintained the overall effectiveness judgement and the judgements for the domains of impact of leaders, help and protection, children in care and care leavers (this domain was changed for individual judgements for children in care and care leavers from 2023). Judgements continue to be made from a menu of inadequate, requires improvement, good or outstanding.

The decision to continue with the same judgements used in the SIF Inspections was not without challenge. A position statement issues jointly by the Local Government Association (LGA), Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and Solace (2015), commented:

> 'Single worded judgements cannot adequately capture the complexities and the interdependencies of agencies' actions to protect and care for children in a local area, and therefore cannot form a basis for improvement……. Narrative judgements are a much better way of acknowledging the high risk and complex nature of this work. ……The Ofsted construct of the 'inadequate local authority' is counterproductive to recruiting and retaining high quality social work staff, with vacancy rates running as high as 50% in some local areas, forestalling the organisation's capacity to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families (LGA, ADCS & Solace, 2015, p. 5).

Despite these comments, Ofsted maintained that single word added value and were generally felt to be helpful. However, the death by suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry in January 2023 after her school was downgraded to inadequate following an inspection, firmly placed the issue of single word judgements under a spotlight.

On the 2 September 2024, it was announced that the 'Government pushes ahead with reform agenda by scrapping single headline Ofsted judgements for schools with immediate effect' (MH Government, 2024).

An article published by Community Care on the 3 September 2024 confirmed that overall effectiveness grades for councils and social care providers will be replaced report card style assessment tool. Commenting, Ofsted's national director for social care stated that no date had been set for this reform (Samuel, 2024).

Whilst the exact details of the reforms are to be announced, it has been indicated that it is only the overall effectiveness judgement that will cease. Judgements for the domains of impact of leaders, help and protection, children in care and care leavers are expected to remain using the current 'single word' outcomes. It seems to me that Ofsted inspections will continue to contain judgements about the quality and efficacy of services. It is not suggested that the judgment in relation to leadership will be excluded from future inspections.

1.13 Emotional Impact of Ofsted Inspections

Information about the emotional impact on social care professionals of inspection is limited to observations relating to the inspection process overall (Munroe, 2014, Jones 2015). There is, however, several pieces of research that explore the emotional impact of inspection on education professionals.

A study undertaken by Jeffrey and Woods (1996) concluded that the nature of Ofsted inspections undermined the holistic and humanistic values of a significant cohort of teachers, which in turn caused a high degree of emotional trauma for them. The emotional impact was not limited to response to the direct experience during the inspection fieldwork, nor was it because of an outcome of failure or poor leadership, but

it was socially and politically constructed. The study found that the specific inspection explored had resulted in feelings of de-professionalisation with high degrees of confusion, anxiety and self-doubt in relation to their confidence. These feelings extended beyond their professional selves (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996).

Davis (2012) repeats many of these assertions, claiming that teachers suffer breakdowns due to the stress of pending inspections and the constant of ongoing preparations, much of which is undertaken outside of the normal working day.

Ofsted itself recognises the impact of a poor inspection outcome. A report entitled 'Lessons learned from special measures 1999' acknowledged that failure will sometimes leave leaders and teachers questioning their own worth, and that feelings of anger, resentment and blame can be counterproductive in bringing about improvements.

Learmonth (2000) amplifies the impact of an inadequate Ofsted judgement on the emotional lives of teachers and draws parallels to how people experience bereavement, concluding: 'whatever the justification for the emotional distress which the Ofsted process may cause, there is something unsatisfactory about a procedure which may cause so much distress and then leaves someone else …. to rebuild and sustain the emotional resilience which it originally undermined' (Learmonth, 2000, p. 78).

A case study by Perryman (2007) explored the impact of a school placed in special measures following through to a subsequent successful inspection. Perryman concluded that the whole experience had a significant emotional impact on staff, with words such as 'guilt' and 'shame' featuring in discourses, concluding that 'the emotional impact of

the inspection, with its fear and loss of control and a sense of self-worth can in the worst cases lead to teachers being unable to continue their work' (Perryman, 2007, p. 6).

In 2019, Ofsted commissioned research from the Department of Social Work and Social Care at Birmingham University which analysed Ofsted's review of the newly introduced most recent inspection framework. This independent evaluation, dated July 2019, is presented in full in the Ofsted review (Ofsted, 2019, pp. 41-66).

Generally, they found that the revised (ILACS) inspection framework has been well received by children's social care professionals.

In relation to the impact and value of the judgement grades they stated:

> 'ILACS has attempted to improve grade descriptors, refocusing them away from processes and more towards impact type statements……. While the framework itself and the feedback inspections gave them was regarded as having value, the judgement grades in themselves were not used in a meaningful way by LAs to improve their practice. The judgement grades were seen by LAs as having value in securing political support and funding for the service. However, the grade Ofsted issues, the perceived meaning of this label, and its potential consequences, resulted in high levels of anxiety for staff we observed at all levels in the LAs……..Furthermore, senior leaders believed that receiving a grade that meant the service was judged to have declined or failed could be very damaging and destabilising to services. In the light of these findings, Ofsted should review the value of issuing grades for judgement inspections.' (p. 72).

Ofsted responded with a forceful rebuttal of this recommendation, firstly challenging the researcher's accuracy of the analysis of the data and later stating that 'Ofsted's grading system is recognised as good practice among inspectorates both nationally and internationally. It provides an objective view of the quality of care that is comparable across different LAs, and it enables the public and government to easily understand the quality of children's services' (Ofsted, 2019, pp. 72-73).

In my view this response was ill considered. Readers of the independent research, commissioned by Ofsted, may come to a conclusion that Ofsted were not prepared to acknowledge any feedback which did not align to their view.

In 2023 there appeared to be a slight softening in Ofsted's tone. In the annual report of His Majety's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's and Skills 2022/23, it was acknowledged that:

> 'Inspection, like any form of scrutiny, may never be entirely comfortable for the recipient. But we try to make it as positive and valuable an experience as it can be – and make sure it is always grounded in the best interests of children and learners. The inspection feedback that we collect regularly and publish in our annual reports consistently shows that in a very high proportion of our work, it lands as it should. It is Ofsted that has to make the tough calls when provision of any kind is not good enough for children, and some contention will always flow from that' (Ofsted, 2023).

The annual report continued to maintain that 'overall single-word judgments' remained a key component in the formal feedback of an inspection. The emotional impact of an inadequate Ofsted inspection outcome had become the focus of media attention in January 2023 and beyond, following the suicide of Headteacher Ruth Perry. Particular concern was raised about the use of single-word judgements, which, it is asserted, distort and undermine what was viewed by the inspectors. There is also a significant delay between the inspection and the publication of the report, which remains confidential and embargoed, thus denying leaders the opportunity to seek support from their professional network. I would assert, the defensive stance by the Ofsted Chief Inspector was considered callous and uncaring which failed to acknowledge its role in Ms Perry's death.

1.14 The big listen: Ofsted's engagement with professionals that it regulates and inspects

In 2024, Ofsted commissioned research with professionals and providers of services that they regulate. It is unclear, as it is not acknowledged, whether this research was undertaken as a direct result of criticism aimed at the organisation following the death of Ruth Perry, but this significant study - entitled - *Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals* – is the most comprehensive study of the impact of Ofsted inspection from those it inspects (Ofsted, 2024).

Given the scale of Ofsted's inspection activity in education, overall most findings were weighted to views from the education sector. However, there were some key messages for children's social care providers. The data is based upon 3,496 providers

(who responded as provider representatives) and 3,831 professional staff (who responded as individuals):

- 72 per cent of social care providers and/or individuals trusted Ofsted to deliver accurate, balanced and fair judgments (p. 10).
- 76 per cent (across all services inspected by Ofsted) felt that inspection reports were clear
- 47 per cent of social care providers and professionals felt that a single word overall judgement was appropriate, although most felt that a poor judgement in one specific domain should not influence an overall judgement (there was a need for a more balanced approach).
- The impact of an Ofsted inspection in improving performance was not included in this research for social care.
- 52 per cent of all asked stated that Ofsted inspection improved provision (comment: caution needs to be applied as social care improvement was not specifically included in the research questions).
- Over 50 per cent of those who responded stated that an Ofsted inspection had a negative impact on staff – again this is a generalised finding with more school-based staff commenting negatively (p. 46).
- 36 per cent of social care staff stated that an Ofsted inspection increased workloads (p. 49).

  (Ofsted, 2024).

In presenting the finding from the study, Ofsted suggested that no participant in the study expressed negative views about inspection as a vehicle to assess the quality of services being provided or of Ofsted, as organisation. The findings, generally accord

with other research or commentary explored as part of this study and from my own experience. However, there is an absence of actions that address the issues raised. Whilst the reported findings suggested that Ofsted was trusted to provide a fair and balanced inspection, which was presented in a way that was felt helpful , the impact on workload and staff morale lacks further analysis. Single-word judgements were felt less helpful for over half of respondents and almost the same number of respondents felt that the inspection outcome improved services. These remain significant challenges which left unaddressed have the potential to continue to undermine the efficacy of inspection as a driver for positive change.

In September 2024 Ofsted announced changes to the way in which it will present their findings from inspection moving forward. The impact of these changes on leaders remains unknown.

1.15 Chapter Summary

The chapter explores inspection as a means of control and how this has developed. It is suggested inspection is key to improving services which ultimately improves the life chances of children and their families and protects them from harm.

Much of the literature that considers the impact of an Ofsted inspection stems from the education sector, where there is a wider range of research than currently exists in the field of social care. This literature, together with limited, but an emerging body of work that explores the direct impact of inspection on social care professionals presents readers with reflective commentary on the purpose, value and impact of inspection. The

chapter acknowledges that inspection is an ever evolving process through the introduction of revised inspection frameworks designed to maintain the integrity of an inspection but also subtly acknowledges criticism of a process that many senior leaders find emotionally and professionally challenging.

Chapter Two explores the theoretical perspectives that my study relies upon to help make sense of the experiences of senior leaders who have experienced an inadequate Ofsted Judgement.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 Chapter overview

The focus of this study is an exploration of the lived experience of senior leaders following the specific event of an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement. Whilst I am interested in the biographical timeline – what happened when, I also seek to understand the emotional responses to these events both at the time they occurred and their legacy.

This study is situated in a psycho-social theoretical framework, which draws upon, but not exclusively, theory and practice derived from psychoanalysis. I do not present my thesis as a psychoanalytic study; but have considered and used elements of the theories and concepts to guide my thinking and add further insight into participants narratives.

Classic Freudian concepts, such as projection, transference and countertransference are drawn upon, alongside Kleinian and other post-Kleinian theories, which is commonly referred to as 'object relations'. The work of Wilfred Bion, in his later work expanded this to include how early experiences of being contained can be applied within groups.

Klein and Bion expanded on many of Freud's ideas about unconscious processes and how they impact on development and behaviour, sometimes referred to as 'psychic retreats' (Keval, 2005, p. 31), are rooted in early childhood development. These

unconscious processes are the building blocks of the ego and the psychic determinants of most personality patterns, which help us navigate through life.

The concepts developed by Freud, Klein, Bion and have been helpful in exploring the unconscious processes that underpin issues such as anxiety and emotional distress caused by an inadequate Ofsted inspection and the professional consequences. The main concepts from Freud, Klein and Bion are described.

Lyn Froggett in her book Love, Hate and Welfare (2002) explores and links between psychoanalytic concepts and development of social policy and practice in the caring professions. The tenet of her argument is that psychodynamic concepts and theory are critical to understanding and the development of social policy and how this is understood.

Froggett asserts that psychoanalytic concept in psycho-social thinking had lost traction over time citing Howe (1998) who, when pursuing the development of the clinical and diagnostic implications of attachment theory, put forward an argument for the return of relational-based practice. He submitted that the application of relationship-based practice had been sidelined for a preference for measurement of need and external behavior. According to Froggett, (Howe, 1996) points out that this shift follows a trend towards a pre-occupation with surface at the expense of depth, abandoning any attempt to 'trace the underlying connections between motivation, personality, meaning and the social environment' (Froggett, 2002, p. 32).

I am drawn to Froggett's (2002) discussion of how the loss of relational based practice was a fundamental shift in the provision of welfare services. She advocates for its 'revitalisation based of a politics of recognition, and suggest that the recovery of narrative and biographical methods can provide a basis for this' (p. 1).

Froggett (2006) devotes a chapter entitled Beyond welfare: vision, voice and story (pp.169-181) to explore the importance of narrative as a form of 'mental activity which lends themselves to the establishment of communicative and analytical links between different way of life, between individuals and moral communities and across social divides' (p. 174). Narrative or 'story telling' is positioned firmly within a constructivist approach. Froggett posits that listening to people's stories requires paying attention to what they say and a comparison of their version of events with other perspectives. Further, she says that these narratives convey much more than information –'it reveals a certain quality of effort mobilised in its production – or lack of it' (p.177). As such, she asserts narrative is a 'sensitive analytic tool' which 'influences what is attended to and defining the boundaries of meaning' (p. 177).

Finally, she states that narrative captures 'sequence and implicated in the production of memory' (p. 175). This, she asserts, is important is recovery from trauma. Recovery 'involves learning to tell the story in which the pain is located, recognised, and acknowledged in the context of a much larger narrative…. So it is no longer a catastrophic breach but part of an intelligible flux' (p. 175). The concept of the 'defended subject' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2001, 2008, 2013), where stories are reframed as a defence against anxiety (Rustin, 2015), amplifies the coherence between constructivism and psychoanalytic theory and concepts.

The chapters opens with an overview of the relevant psychoanalytic theory and concepts. It draws primarily, on the work of Freud, Klien and Bion and how their theoretical constructs, obtained through clinical psychoanalysis, have been developed to extend beyond the consulting room.

I go on to think about the organisational context in which my study is situated, before offering a view about leadership and professional identity.

The chapter concludes with an exploration of accountability and responsibility, anger, and denial and, also how blame and scapegoating permeates organisational life.

2.2 Psychoanalytic theory and concepts – a brief overview of the work of Freud, Klein, Bion and Bowlby

Sigmund Freud 1856 – 1939

Freud is often referred to as the founder of psychoanalysis, although his initial clinical work was influenced by Josef Breuer (Freud and Bruer, 1895). Freud's theories and concepts are focuses on understanding the underlying emotional conflicts and unconscious processes that contribute to psychological distress. The notion of both the conscious and unconscious are critical.

The term 'psychoanalysis' is two dimensional as it refers to a body of theoretical knowledge as well as a treatment technique (Agass & Preston-Shoot, 1990, p.18). Developed by Freud in the 1890's, clinically it can be described as a type of

psychological treatment based on the theory that our present is shaped by our past. The unacknowledged meaning of personal experiences can influence our mood and behaviour, and contribute to problems with relationships, work and self-esteem (McLeod, 2024).

Underlying this simplistic definition, is a complex theoretical concept. The origins derive from Freud's free-association technique is his clinical work, where the patient was encouraged to say anything that came to mind, provided him with a tool for studying the meanings of what was being said. From these investigations he was led to a new concept of the structure of personality: the id, ego, and superego. The id is the unconscious drives and impulses derived from the genetic background and concerned with the preservation and propagation of life. The ego, according to Freud, operates in conscious and preconscious levels of awareness. It is the portion of the personality concerned with the tasks of reality: perception, cognition, and executive actions. In the superego lie the individual's environmentally derived ideals and values and the mores of family and society; the superego serves as a censor on the ego functions. Freud concluded that conflicts among the three structures of the personality are repressed and lead to the arousal of anxiety. The person is protected from experiencing anxiety directly by the development of defence mechanisms, which are learned through family and cultural influences. It is when these defence mechanisms inhibit normal functioning that they become problematic.

Within a clinical relationship, Freud suggested that the patient's emotional attachment to the analyst represented a transference of the patient's relationship to parents or important parental figures. Freud held that those strong feeling

unconsciously projected to the analyst, influenced the patient's capacity to make free associations. By exploring these responses and the resistances they evoked and by bringing the patient to think about the origin of those feelings, Freud concluded that the analysis of the transference and the patient's resistance to its analysis were the keystones of psychoanalytic therapy (Jones, 1961). Alongside transference, Freud later identified that counter-transference was an integral part of the patient-therapist relationship.

Transference, according to Freud, was a concept which described the emotions that the patient developed towards the analyst. These could be either positive or negative feelings. Whilst the concept of transference is, perhaps, relatively straightforward, it is a complex interplay between patient and therapist within a therapeutic relationship within a treatment setting. Freud initially saw transference as the patients 'emotional feelings' being 'projected' upon the therapist and thus a barrier to effective 'treatment'. Over time Freud begun acknowledged that an ability to recognise these feelings were an important part of the clinical relationship as they allowed them to be examined.

In his clinical work, he began to recognise that alongside transference was 'countertransference' whereby the therapist also had emotional reactions to the patient. He explained this as the influence of the patient on the unconscious feelings of the therapist. Initially, Freud viewed this as negative, but he later realised that it could provide helpful and important insights into the therapeutic relationship (Snowden, 2006). The concept of transference and counter-transference extends beyond the therapeutic relationship of patient and analyst as described by Freud. My study derives from personal experience and relies on the narratives of participants that shared similar experiences. It was important in my role as a researcher that I was alive to the participants feelings, and

begin to make sense of these as they told their stories in a way that my own experience did not prevent further discourse or distort them. This is explored further in chapter three.

The concept of transference and counter-transference (Breuer et al, 2000) remain an important psychoanalytic theory.

Melanie Klein

Klein's contribution to the development of psychoanalysis and the theoretical position of how personality and an ability to relate to others derives from her work and observations of infants. She asserts that this is an unconscious process.

Klein's (1923) theory of the unconscious is based on the phantasy[6] life of the infant from birth. The unconscious process of splitting and projection, whereby internal structure are projected onto the outer world (Bower, 2005, p. 9). In later work, Klein's (1929) added to her initial thoughts and concluded that the development of personality and how one relates to the world straddles two psychic states: the paranoid schizoid and the depressive positions. The paranoid schizoid position is described as defences against pain and anxiety, which leads to splitting and projection. These mechanisms are defensive where aspects of the self that are perceived as bad are projected on others.

[6] In Kleinian theory unconscious phantasies underlie every mental process and accompany all mental activity. Fantasy (as is normally spelt) suggests a conscious process (Bot Spillus et al, 2011).

The depressive position is described as a more grounded psychological position whereby previous feelings such as love, or hate can be ‘contained’ in a more manageable form – although at times others may need to support this process. Unlike the paranoid schizoid position, which can be present throughout life, the depressive position is not a permanent state, with children (and adults) moving between them (Bower, 2005, pp. 9–10). It is acknowledged from Klein’s work that the concept of defences against anxiety takes shape.

The psychoanalytic terms splitting, projection, projective identification and objects relation theory are key concepts attributable to the work of Klein.

Splitting is considered central to both Kleinian and object relations theories. The Kleinian concept of 'splitting' derives from her observations of infants and their relationship with their primary caregiver. It can refer to internal splitting of the ego (the part of the psyche which reacts to external reality and which a person sees as the ‘self’) into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or splitting of an external object into ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The infant creates two mental images of the same object. For instance, the ‘good breast’ and the ‘bad breast’. The caregiver is seen as a good object ‘when’ the infants’ needs are met, for example being fed and ‘bad’ when they are not (Etherington, 2020).

Klein’s theory was that infants develop defence mechanisms to deal with the anxiety of seeing objects as both good and bad. Klien expanded upon Freud’s concept of Projection. Projection happens when a child casts bad thoughts or anxieties onto another person, usually a parent. Introjection happens when an infant fantasizes that the good object is always there. Klien’s theory of splitting, projection and introjection is complex.

In its crudest form, it involves the infant unconscious splitting of the bad object (feelings) and projecting it into the parent (usually the mother). The parent unconsciously processes these feelings and introjects them back into the infant in a more manageable (for the infant) form.

My study identified splitting and projection as a common feature. It can be seen in circumstances where there is a need to find fault often as a way to protect oneself from anxiety. By distancing yourself from the reality, you see the another person as 'bad' and project you feelings into them, therefore protecting yourself.

The concept of 'projective identification' (Klein, 1946) was discussed briefly by Klein, as a defence mechanism. The infant splits off unacceptable parts of themselves, projects them onto another object, and then finally introjects them back into themselves in a changed form. In the process of taking objects into themselves, the infant feels that they have become like that object, by identifying with that object (Etherington, 2020). Whilst this is considered an undeveloped construct within its own right, it is widely credited in the development of the understanding of countertransference and the work of Bion in the development of his theory of containment (Bower, 2005, pp. 10–11).

Projective identification is considered to be an important concept of organisational functioning. Individual behaviour is often attributed to personal problems rather than any link to organisational dynamic. Halton (2019) argued that the link can be made using the concept of projective identification. It is suggested that projective identification often 'leads to the recipient acting out the counter-transference deriving from the projected feelings' and further 'that feelings and behaviour are likely to continue

until there is a conscious realisation that they have become trapped in a counter-transference response to the projective process' (p. 16). An example would be when a member of the group on behalf of other members of the group becomes the receptacle for all the emotions of the group and may export something on behalf of the group for which 'they do then do not need to feel in themselves' (p.).

Splitting, projection and projective identification are considered central to social defence mechanisms (described later).

Klein created object relations theory that suggested infant relationships to objects; an object being a person, not only their physical presence in the outer world, but their internal representations too, would ultimately dictate future relationships and attachment style. She believed negative relationships at a young age would deeply impact their future lives (Flanagan et al, 2008).

The development of object relations theory sees the need to form relationships, not sexual pleasure as suggested by Freud, as the prime motivation for human behaviour and personality development (Etherington, 2020). Object relations theory emphasises how external structures shape the inner world (Frosh, 2010).

Object relations theory posits that it is the early childhood relationships with primary caregivers (normally mothers) which shape the emotional development and later interactions. Object relations theory places less emphasis on biological based concepts (i.e. the good and bad mothers' breast) and more significance on the consistent patterns of interpersonal relationships (Etherington, 2020).

Object relation theory focuses primarily on the interaction individuals have with others, how those interactions are internalised, and how these now internalised object relations affect one's psychological framework. The term "object" refers to the potential embodiment of fear, desire, envy or other comparable emotions (Greenburg, 1983, p. 16). Objects relations theory remains a central post Kleinian psychoanalytic thinking.

Wilfred Bion

Bion trained as a medical doctor before coming interested in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, where he trained for a number of years at the Tavistock clinic. Training under Klein, much of Bion's early work concentrated on studies of infant development. His theories, stemming from his clinical work, built upon and expended Klein's concepts of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and her concept of projective identification. From this he introduced the concept of container- contained. Later Bion began to consider the development of his ideas about the inner world of the individual and its relationship to the early unconscious phantasy's and how these translated to (adult) group mentality. His thinking was not supported Kien, especially his thoughts in relation to counter-transference as an expanded version of Klein's concept of projective identification (Chris Mawson, 2012 – courtesy of the Melanie Klein Trust).

Containment, developed by Bion (1962), is a concept that is based on the model of the mother as a container for the infant's projected needs, feelings and unwanted parts. The container receives this raw material, returning it in a more manageable form to the infant. Bion defines containment in terms of a shifting container–contained relationship.

The process of containing, referred to as 'introjective identification' (Hinshelwood, 1995). The containers determine the extent to which the projected and unwanted part of the self can later become consciously articulated and reintegrated. Containing can be viewed as a process of psychic digestion, in which the container's senses receive and examine what has been projected before the next stage can begin: the emotional and cognitive work of deciding what is psychologically useful and needs to be reintegrated (Miller, 2019).

Bion's theory of containment also draws upon the notions of 'reverie' and 'nameless dread'.

Reverie was the term that Bion used to describe the calm and receptive state of mind required of the container who is ready to introject and make sense of what has been projected. Nameless dread was a concept introduced by Bion (1962b). He saw it as a state of psychological fear that occurs in the infant when the parent fails to contain his or her experiences and make them meaningful, digestible and understandable. These emotional feelings are intense to the point where the infant fears for their survival. The absence of containment means that the infant has no way of making sense of these experiences and reducing their anxiety. Although Bion's theory was developed through his work with infants, it has become central in understanding how individuals' function in highly emotive situations. Bion's work is considered pivotal to our understanding of group dynamics.

John Bowlby

John Bowlby was a British psychologist and psychoanalyst who believed that early childhood attachments played a critical role in later development and mental functioning. His work, along with the work of psychologist Mary Ainsworth, contributed to the development of attachment theory (Slade and Holmes, 2019).

Bowlby described attachment as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (Bowlby, 1969). His work initially focussed in understanding the anxiety and distress that children experience when separated from their primary caregivers. Some of the earliest behavioural theories suggested that attachment was simply a learned behaviour. These theories proposed that attachment was merely the result of the feeding relationship between the child and the caregiver. Because the caregiver feeds the child and provides nourishment, the child becomes attached (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby observed that feeding did not diminish anxiety within children. Instead, he found that attachment was characterised by behavioural and motivational patterns. It was not the feeding that was crucial but the close proximity to their caregiver that was a comfort to frightened children.

Although attachment styles displayed in adulthood are not necessarily the same as those seen in infancy, early attachments can have a serious impact on later relationships. Adults who were securely attached in childhood tend to have good self-esteem, strong romantic relationships, and the ability to self-disclose to others (Bowlby, 1969).

2.3 Social defence mechanisms

Psychoanalytically, defence mechanisms were first described by Freud as a response to anxiety. According to Freud, these mechanisms protect the conscious mind from contradictions between the animalistic id and the idealistic superego, ultimately contributing to 'mental homeostasis' (Waqas et al, 2015). Klein added to Freud's views and developed these onto her concepts of paranoid-schizoid anxiety and depressive anxiety (Rustin, 2015, p. 235). Bion also explored these states of mind as he developed his concept of containment.

The application of these concepts permeate ongoing discourse, although the seminal work of Menzies (1959) which considers individual and organisational defences and discussed in greater detail in 2.5 remains central to the translation of the work of the initial concepts developed by Freud and Klein. Rustin (2015) asserts that theories in relation to unconscious defences against anxiety and contemporary psychoanalysis have continued to evolve in parallel, however, he argues that the 'continuing limitation of this paradigm lies in the relatively weak articulation that exists between the clinical use of the concepts of unconscious anxiety and their role in psycho-social kinds of explanation' (p. 239). He suggests that one of the reasons for this lack of articulation is that many clinical psychanalysts do not involve themselves in psycho-social investigations, and those that do undertake investigation into institutional life are not practising psychoanalysts (p. 239).

Rustin (2015) asserts that the issue identified by the social defences against anxiety are a state of mind that is unavoidable in certain social situations. He consider

that these anxieties are normal human emotions in these situations. Citing the detail of Menzies (1959) study, he poses the question as to whether it is the anxieties themselves, as states of mind to be avoided which is the issue or is it the 'dysfunctional unconscious defences' that may arise to attempt to hold these anxieties at bay (p. 240). He suggests it should not be the anxiety itself that should be seen as the problem but how 'these can be lived with and put to positive use (p. 240).

Social defence (against anxiety) mechanism come to the fore as behaviours by either individuals or groups to address the object or objects that are creating the anxiety. Such behaviours often include apportioning blames outside the individual or group. A collective (or group response) may also include the alienation of one or more members from the remainder of the group. In addition, in group situations mechanisms or systems can be introduced into organisations with good intentions but can then be distorted by the context in which they are located. The shortcoming of social systems as defences against anxiety, however, is their inability to directly address the sources of anxiety (Foster, 2013).

Accepting that anxiety is a natural emotion in certain social situations poses a question about how these emotions can be made more tolerable. Bion's (1961) concept of containment, whereby an individual's challenging emotional experiences are made tolerable by projection of these feelings into someone else (container) who modifies them and re-presents those same experiences back to the individual in a more manageable form. Containing anxiety at the level of the group follows is the same as at an individual level. In circumstances where containment is lacking, it is easy for groups to go 'off task'

and to resort to dysfunctional behaviours, in-keeping with those associated with social systems as defences against anxiety (Whittaker, 2011).

Obholzer (2019) asserts that for the container to have the be best chance they need to be operating from Klein's (1929) depressive position in order to have the capacity to face both 'external and psychic reality' (p. 178). Obholzer further states that for this to happen in organisations there needs to be common agreement about the primary task and a common understanding of the nature of the anxieties that are being projected 'rather than defensively blocking them out of awareness' (p. 178). This requires open dialogue and an ability to accept their powerlessness in preventing the normal anxious emotions from occurring.

2.4 The Organisational Context

Ofsted inspections deliver judgements on children's services which sit within a much wider organisation structure of a 'local authority' in England. Local authorities are complex organisations. There are, in total, 353 local authorities in England – a combination of single-tier or two-tier authorities. One hundred and twenty-five authorities are single-tier with responsibility for all services. (Goddard, 2019). The Local Government Association (LGA) 2018 guidance for new Councillors, stated that local authorities in England are subject to "1,300 different statutory duties and responsibilities", such as social care for the elderly, education, maintenance of green spaces and road repairs (LGA, 2018, p. 4). As such, an Ofsted inspection judgement, whilst focussing on a unique statutory function, is an overarching judgement on the local authority as a whole.

It is the complex interplay between the individuals and the organisation that is a central tenet of my research. Engagement with an organisation is, by definition, engaging with a social system – a system that exists in the real world designed to effectively discharge it's primary task. Psychanalytically, organisations comprise of people, and the conscious and unconscious dynamics of interpersonal relationships that individuals bring to their roles and the discharge of the primary task (Mosse, 2019).

2.5 The Primary Task

Rice (1958) is credited with the development of the concept of the primary task. He asserts that systems or subsystems have at any given time one task that is the primary task – the task they were created to perform. In making judgements about organisations there are two questions to be asked. What is the primary task and how well is it performed? (pp. 22–33). He further developed this concept with Miller (Miller and Rice, 1967). It derives from Bion's work with groups.

Whilst there is no official definition, I would suggest that the primary task of children's social care is the prevention of harm to children, either through measures to prevent harm from occurring or supporting vulnerable children.

This oversimplistic definition belies an incredibly complex, sophisticated and highly skilled set of interactions and direct actions required, often delivered in highly charged emotionally challenging circumstances. The risks resulting from failure are very real, with potentially fatal consequences in the most extreme cases.

Developing the work of Lawrence (1977), who used a psychoanalytic framework to develop three ways of describing a primary task, Ruch and Murray (2011) explore the complexities of the primary task.

Lawrence (1977) had described these three forms as: i) the normative primary task, namely the formal or official task and broad aims of an organisation; ii) the existential primary task – this is what those charged with carrying out the primary task believe they are doing, which is often how they view roles and responsibilities; and finally iii) the phenomenal task, which is the task people are actually doing, albeit at times on an unconscious level.

An analysis of behaviours of individuals and groups can highlight the differences between what an organisation sets out to do and what it is actually doing. It is the degree of similarities or differences in the approach to the primary task that determines how well the organisation is performing (Ruch & Murray, 2011).

Often cited, Menzies' (1959) case study of a nursing service in a general hospital is credited with furthering an understanding of how in organisations social defences may emerge that create conditions that seek to protect members from anxiety, that may also be detrimental to individuals. The study explored why some student nurses exited their training programmes early and why tasks were distorted, from those of the primary tasks as a way to protect members from anxiety.

The primary task of a hospital is that it 'accepts and cares for ill people who cannot be cared for in their own home' (Menzies, p. 97). The responsibility for the performance

of this primary task rests predominantly with the nursing staff who provide the day to day patient care. Menzies (1959) described this as 'the nursing service, therefore, bears the full, immediate, and concentrated impact of the stresses of patient care' (p. 97). Anxiety and stress is a natural and perhaps unavoidable part of organisational life, even when these are recognised and tolerated. For professions where the risks of failure are great, such as the loss of life, the potential for heightened anxiety can be equally great.

It is argued that for many of the student nurses the 'calling' to the profession was their desire to care for fellow human beings. However, what Menzies and her team realised was the hospital environment, through changes to duties, limited contact with the patients, and a lack of clarity about the decisions they could make and frequent last minutes changes discouraged this calling. The reason was because of the potentially crippling effects of anxiety. A nurse who became too attached to a patient or the patient's situation risked strong negative emotions should that patient pass away or the condition significantly worsen. The effects of that anxiety could lead to depression or otherwise harm the nurse's performance. Nurses were therefore encouraged to limit their emotional contact or commitment to patients, their families, and other nurses. Menzies concluded that it was the lack of this interpersonal relationship that led to many good nursing students moving away from the profession.

Using psychoanalytic concepts, Menzies (1959) was able to position her findings through a socio-psychological lens that asserted how anxiety is a natural emotion and why humans must develop ways to cope.

Menzies study was a central tenet of making sense of organizational life (Obholzer & Zagier Roberts 2109). This is often described as the Tavistock approach to the development of thinking and practice of how organisations functions. Lawlor (2019), in his paper considers whether Menzie's study has stood the test of time. He asserts 'her conclusions give a powerful picture of dynamic processes at work within an institutionally defensive system'(unnumbered paper).

Lawlor (2019) considers Menzies observations that feelings of anxiety can often be attributed to both 'distorted or alienated relationships at work' which are closely associated with what the operational tasks of the organisation are. These feelings are collectively managed by a set of 'social defences' by which staff avoid fulfilling their roles and primary tasks which ultimately prevents capacity to accomplish the task. Whilst systems and process have been adapted to 'protect' workers from the 'anxiety' associated with the task, this has the effect of 'frequently creating a distorted relationship between the group and its wider environment, that is, its service users or clients. The "outside" is scapegoated or devalued in some way to preserve the "inside". A group dominated by its own social defence's retreats from the boundary it shares with its environment into its collective fantasies and delusions' (unnumbered pages).

Lawlor asserts that these traits can be addressed when groups stop looking to others to manage their anxiety in relation to the primary task, although goes on to state that this is a complex, often limited process. He draws upon a desire of their 'psychological wholeness' as a motivator for group development. (Lawlor, 2019, unnumbered pages).

He concludes that Menzies work has, indeed stood the test of time and is widely incorporated in the day to day practice within health and social care. However, he is less convinced that it has had any meaningful impact for policy makers and those responsible for the design of organisational systems in health and social care (Lawlor, 2019). I am drawn to Lawlor's conclusions. It seems to me that there remains a significant risk of 'distortions' to the primary task to survive an Ofsted inspection. These risks, where the focus of fulfilling the primary task becomes secondary and blurs boundaries; staff become unclear of what the expectations for their roles are.

2.6 Power and Authority within Organisations

Organisation, power, authority and leadership are interconnected. As an example, it is the relationship between authority, power and leadership that is essential for the 'competent functioning of any organisation' (Obholzer, p. 49).

In exploring authority, Obholzer (2019) asserts that authority 'refers to the right to make an ultimate decision, and in an organisation…. to make decisions which are binding on others' (p. 49). He suggests that this authority comes from above, from below and from within' (p. 49 -52). In simple terms, authority from above denotes authority that derives from others. This is often most apparent in hierarchical structures. However, this is not always straightforward. In some systems it is a combination of a hierarchical structure together with other 'stakeholders', for example elected members, clients, staff, partner agencies etc together with non-negotiable statutory functions.

As an example, the director of children's services (DCS) is a statutory role. The Children Act 2004, requires this appointment and the postholder is required to ensure the discharge of the education and children's social services functions of the local authority. Whilst the DCS is usually part of a hierarchical leadership structure normally reporting to a more senior officer, it is the DCS not the more senior officer who is responsible for the statutory function.

Authority from below, according to Obholzer (2019), refers to the concept by which individuals joining an organisation delegates part of their personal authority to those in authority (or perhaps more commonly thought of as 'in charge') thus confirming their part in the system and the system as a whole. Again, as with authority from above described earlier, this is not necessarily a simple construct as it often combines explicit and conscious, or unconscious components. An example, suggests Obholzer, is the nature and degree of ambivalence in relation to the delegation of authority to those in charge. Simply, authority may be delegated to the role rather than the person. Decisions may be made that appear to undermine he individuals authority (Obholzer, 2019, p. 50).

Authority from within considers how authority also derives from the relationships that exist from their 'inner world' (Obholzer, 2019, p51). This is a complex construct of unconscious processes, often to do with past authority figures in their inner word, that can result in 'self-doubt'. The converse, which again derives from unconscious processes, is what Obholzer describes as 'psychopathological omnipotence' – 'an inflated picture of the self as regards to being in authority' as position likely to cause conflict (p. 51).

The second point is power. Obholzer (2019) describes this as an 'ability to act' which is attributed to the person rather than the role and can be influenced by both internal and external forces. The external factors of power comes directly from what an individual controls or can influence. Internally, power comes from knowledge, experience, personality and their state of mind in respect of the role, including external projections (Obholzer, 2019, p. 52). It seems sensible that the converse also exists. Powerlessness (or feeling of) share many of the described attributes. Powerlessness is significant in this study. Despite holding senior professional roles participants described often feeling impotent in being able to exercise power and control in relation to key decisions. This became more intense when the decisions being made were about them.

The third domain, as introduced by Obholzer (2019) – leadership – is explored later. However, it is all three domains, as suggested by Obholzer that influences what he describes as 'on task leadership' which relates directly to the aims of the organisation and the primary task (Obholzer, 2019, p. 55).

2.7 Leaders: their work, needs and inner conflicts

Within organisations leaders, I would assert, are simply seen as such. Often scant thought is given to how and why leaders have attained the position they occupy.

Although not specifically about leaders, Zagier Roberts (2019), through a series of short vignettes, considers why workers choose their profession, what they bring to their roles, their needs and inner conflicts, and most importantly how 'these make them particularly vulnerable to getting caught up in the institutional defences arising from

shared anxieties' (p. 127). Her paper straddles both the organisational context and leadership.

She suggests that the choice of profession, especially in caring professions are influenced by a need to come to terms with unresolved issues from the past, based on our own lived experiences. She states that often people are drawn to particular settings as it allows them to work with people with similar needs and propensity to fit with certain kinds of defences, which Bion (1961) describes a valency. She furthers asserts that many of the conscious choices of our roles are based on idealism. Idealism, however, also has unconscious influential factors which can contribute to defensive institutional processes. Professional idealism, group identity, guilt and reparation are, she asserts, closely related. Group identity is closely associated with its link to the primary task, albeit that this includes being different to some other group. She gives examples that suggest that the primary task that an individual or group associates with is 'better' than another group (p. 127-132).

Zagier Roberts (2019) introduces, I suggest, significant insights as to why people enter the caring profession. An Ofsted judgment of inadequate, especially in relation to leadership, based on personal experience, is professionally devasting. Social work leaders, I assert, fundamentally believe that they can and do make a difference to the life chances of children and their families. To be found wanting goes to the core of their beliefs and aspirations.

My research explores the role of leaders and leadership. The terms 'management' and 'leadership' within children's social care are used interchangeably, although the term

‘leadership’ is becoming much more widely used. Leadership is usually defined as people who are in positions of authority within their organisations. The study of leadership has been growing since the 1970s. Hogan and Kaiser (2005) suggest that ‘leadership should be defined in terms of the ability to build and maintain a group that performs well relative to its competition’ (p. 172).

Orazi et al. (2103) state that there has been increased attention over the past decade in relation to public services leadership and the impact on service delivery. They assert that there are fundamental differences from leadership in the private sector that centre around the higher accountability to stakeholders, much greater bureaucracy and red tape, and a focus on what is of benefit to others rather than income generation. Public services operate under the direction of national and local political leaders. ‘Most approaches emphasise that the agency of public servants, the ethical dimensions including social justice and moral purpose, whilst not unique to leadership in the public services, is nonetheless a key component of public service leadership’ (Chapman et al., 2017, p. 3).

Emerging texts in relation to leadership in social work consider a link between the concept of leadership and that of management, arguing that leadership permeates through all levels of the professional social work role (Fairtlough, 2018). Fairtlough argues that successful leadership in social work is about promoting and sustaining relationship-based practice. Good social work leadership is, I would assert using Ofsted terminology, about the ability to create the necessary environment for practice to flourish (Ofsted, 2017).

Cooper (2018b) argues that the notion that leadership models are easily transferable from the private to the public sector is problematic as they fail to fully take account of the relational nature of the social work leadership task. Social work is, intrinsically, about relationships. It evokes feelings and emotional connections with families and, I would suggest, exposes workers to situations that can be psychologically challenging.

Fairtlough (2018) considers the work of Burns (2010) in exploring two concepts from the general literature on leadership that assist with an understanding of social work leadership: 'transformational leadership and transactional leadership'. She describes transformational leadership as being involved in 'emotions, values and long-term change in people and organisations' (p. 239). Transactional leadership sees the management role 'as being to control the behaviour of subordinates with rewards, punishments and corrective criticism' (p. 239). Another concept she considers is 'distributed leadership', which is designed to encourage successful completion of goals through a shared empowerment of all group members, meaning that leadership is achieved through individual actions rather than through status or position. Participants in this study described being exposed to 'transactional leadership' styles.

In my study, I consider the role of leaders within complex organisations with competing priorities. Building on previous work, in part pioneered by Bion (1961) in his work with groups, Armstrong (2005) promotes the term 'organization in the mind' in which each member holds their view of the institution in their mind. This is significant in terms of how organisations and individuals function, particularly in relation to both internal and external pressures. There is the organisation that is intended, the organisation

that actually exists in reality and the organisation that exists in the minds of all those who work within it. The interactions that occur within an institution may well differ from those that were designed (pp. 1–5).

Stokes (2019) makes a similar point. He says that people working in different parts of the same organisation may not necessarily share the same perspectives. These are often played out in an unconscious way but significantly impact the relationships and interactions between others. He argues that organisations only operate coherently when there is a shared ‘organization in the mind’ among all its members. This study explores not only the individual responses to a poor Ofsted inspection but also the organisational response in the period leading up to, and post, the inspection.

Describing what links a person to others as a group, Bion (1961) introduced the concept of "valency", which he borrowed from chemistry. Citing Bion’s (1961) publication – ‘Experiences in groups and other papers’ – Hafsi (2006) states: ‘He thus defined valency as "the capacity of the individual for instantaneous combination with other individuals in an established pattern of behaviour" (p. 175) and as "the individual's readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on the basic assumptions" (p. 116). According to Bion (1961), ‘a basic assumption group corresponds to an unconscious mental activity, shared by all the members of a group, which "have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives" (p. 146), and which obstruct, divert and occasionally assist the "work group" (WG), the opposite mental activity’ (Bion, 1961). This, he suggests, draws people with similar unresolved issues to particular settings to enable them to communicate in a transparent way, reacting rationally rather than emotionally. However, when something occurs that creates fears and anxieties in

individuals, often not recognisable on a conscious level, the group gives way to collective defensiveness, which can impede the task in hand. Making sense of these fears and anxieties and the defended response within the organisation is a key area of exploration.

Armstrong (2005) explores Bion's theory of valency further. He proposes that it is the interrelation between the individual and context – the individual being the images and ideas about the organisation held by the individual with the emotional experience of the organisation as a whole being a combination of the interrelation between task, structure and context (pp. 15–20).

Armstrong (2005) asserts that members of the group contribute on an individual basis, and often anonymously, according to their unique patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours to the organisations they work within, whilst at the same time contributing to developing shared experiences as co-observers and co-participators in the organisation at both conscious and unconscious levels.

These resonances are informed by the role and the associated boundaries of the role within the organisation. It is suggested that individuals can be influenced to behave in a particular way by the organisational dynamics, and it is the relationship between the individual and the organisation that suggests that emotional experiences of the individuals are not divorced from the organisation they work in, but influence and are influenced by the organisation.

2.8 Professional Identity

The issue of professional identity was important to the participants. Morgan (2021) asserts that over the past generation, access to education has provided access to a variety of jobs, compared to the past where it was more likely that people would follow in the footsteps of their family members' careers. Job title and income are significant markers of identity and directly impact how you are seen as a member of society and how you are judged. She further suggests that many professionals welcome this judgement as it makes them stand out as educationally elite and successful.

Miscenko and Day (2016) reinforce this point, pointing to studies that have explored identity theory, and 'self-verification is a need to affirm one's identity by expressing it through identity-relevant behaviour' (p. 223). They go further by suggesting that where an employee is not able to verify their professional identity through work-related tasks there is a greater risk of experiencing individual negative outcomes (p. 223).

However, professional identity is not without personal risk. Where people become so enmeshed in their career that it begins to define them and their values and ties their self-worth to their careers, Morgan (2021) suggests that 'the successes and failures' experienced will directly impact on self-worth and may lead to an 'identity crisis'. She further goes on to say that where self-worth is linked to a person's career, there is a high risk that when something happens, which is often inevitable, it becomes 'existential for people who have poor coping strategies because it's earth-shattering' and can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety. It is suggested that the more closely someone's

personal identity is associated with their professional identity, the greater the risk that any change will have a detrimental impact on their feelings of self-worth. The saying 'the bigger they are, the harder they fall'[7] neatly captures this experience.

2.09 Accountability, Responsibility and Agency

Fundamental to this study was the degree to which participants were held accountable and lacked agency in decision-making.

The words 'responsibility' and 'accountability' are widely used in everyday parlance, often interchangeably, and are thought to mean the same thing. There are differences but even these are subject to differing interpretations. Addressing a conference in 2021, Seth Godin, an internationally renowned entrepreneur and author, defined the differences as responsibility being actions that we assign to ourselves – no one else can assign responsibility to us – while accountability is when we are liable or answerable for what we do to someone else.

McGrath and Whitty (2018) also state that the confusion between responsibility and accountability can be explained by distinguishing the failure to satisfactorily perform a task (responsibility) from the liability to ensure that it is satisfactorily done (accountability). It could be argued that these definitions are purely semantic; however, in relation to the leadership functions, the differences are, I would assert, important.

[7] It was boxer Jersey Joe Walcott, welterweight champion of the world from 1901 to 1904, who coined the phrase "the bigger they are, the harder they fall".

If we accept that responsibility is about completing tasks or actions that we assign to ourselves, it follows that, paradoxically, responsibility is often linked to fault, blame or guilt, whereas in reality, responsibility is a conscious choice. Accountability, on the other hand, refers to the views of others and a need to be answerable for the outcomes of our actions, decisions and mistakes. Therefore, for those in leadership roles, the challenge is not only to be responsible for the tasks that we have assigned to ourselves but also to be responsible for the outcomes of tasks associated with others. This, I would suggest, is further compounded within political organisations.

In 'moving from blame to accountability', Paul (1997) suggests that when mistakes or failures happen, blame is the natural reflex, even within organisations that may consider themselves to have a clear learning culture. Learning organisation are most successful, I would suggest, when there is clarity about accountability and responsibility but this is not applied in a punitive way.

Shoesmith (2016), citing Rustin (2005), suggests that social workers working in a situation of limited resources, a fear of being accountable in the event of a tragic incident and the complexities of working with difficult families experience unavoidable anxiety in how they think and respond to the work they face (p. 68). Paul (1997) asserts that in situations where accountability is clearly understood, articulated and supported, organisations are created that demonstrate that they are really committed to learning from failure. The fear of failing an inspection share many of the same fears described by Shoesmith (2016).

A sense of agency (Moore, 2016), in its most simplistic terms, refers to the feeling of control over actions and their consequences (p. 1). However, 'as with other aspects of conscious experience, the sense of agency is not an infallible reproduction of objective reality' (p. 2). Agency and successful leadership are significant, particularly when adopting a 'distributed leadership' style, where leaders exercise their agency within and through the organisational structure. 'Agency' within this context is reliant upon responsibility being acted upon across the system.

External forces also impact on individual agency. Anxiety and the fear of failure may distort 'agency'. Agency as a theoretical concept seeks to 'argue that the language of psychological agency and personal meaning must be maintained in any explanatory framework of human behaviour' (Frie, 2008, p. 8).

2.10 Denial and Anger

The previous section explored the notions of accountability, responsibility and agency. In this section I discuss how anger and denial are also significant factors in how people are held responsible and accountable. Underlying this, often, is 'unknowing' or an absence of facts. Fear of knowing also comes into play and is a helpful defence in denial. I suggest that accountability and responsibility are intrinsically linked to feelings of anger and denial. Blame, discussed later, is also part of the complex web of emotions.

In setting the scene it is worth pausing to examine how society sees the role of a social worker. Children's social work and the role of a social worker is, I would assert, widely misunderstood outside of the profession. The public attitude towards children's

social workers is predominantly negative with cries of over interference in private family life at times when social workers have been seen to remove children from their parents' care or incompetent and detached when children have died as a result of serious physical abuse. For many in the profession the mantra 'we are doomed if we do, and doomed if we don't' does not stray far from their minds.

The relationship between children's social workers and the general populous is complex. I have deliberately focussed on children's social workers rather than the general social care workforce. The Ipsos Veracity Index, the longest running poll on trust in professions in Britain, reporting since 1983, placed care home workers as number nine in the list of the most trusted professionals (out of thirty professions). Children's social work did not feature on the list at all (Ipsos, 2022). The report, however, does not make clear whether children's social work as a profession was included in a list of professions available for commenting upon. I would suggest that many members of the pubic have not had direct experience of children's social workers and therefore identifying these professionals as the most or least trusted was not considered within the responses.

The public distrust of children's social workers is not a new phenomenon. Sharon Shoesmith, who was publicly dismissed from her role as Director of Children's Services by the, then, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, following the death of Peter Connolly considers the 'cultural trope that blames socials workers for the harm to children' (Shoesmith, 2016, p. 181). Blame, as a concept, is considered later.

A review of the history of inquiries into the death of children at the hands of their parents, often driven by intense media scrutiny which label social workers as incompetent

and responsible, finds, almost exclusively, that this view is unchallenged. The Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié in 2003, concluded that there were failures by numerous agencies which led to her death, but it was the social worker in the case, Lisa Arthurworrey, who received the most intense media coverage (BBC News, 14 June 2008).

Shoesmith (2016) describes the cultural trope from her own experience with actors from central government, Haringey council and the regulator, Ofsted, driven by ferocious press coverage calling for someone to be held accountable. She argues that 'the cultural trope was intoxicating, persuasive and deeply potent with far reaching effects (p. 197). She further argues that blaming children's social workers for harm to children is a 'defensive process of denial' as to the reality that parents, especially mothers, can and do harm their children (p195).

She considers whether the defensive process described with denial are a kind of unconscious psychological 'psychic retreat' or a 'state of simultaneously knowing or not knowing' as described by Steiner (1993). However, she concludes this is more aligned to Cohen's (2001) model of literal, interpretive or implicatory denial. It is the latter two that she is more focussed on (Shoesmith, 2016, p. 194).

Andrew Cooper in his paper, A short psychosocial history of British child abuse and protection: case studies in problems of mourning in the public sphere (2014a), asserts that at a societal level social workers, routinely protect people from the emotionally unpalatable truth that children are abused and some die as a result. He suggests that from time to time this ambivalence or 'denial' come important to the public, often driven by

intense media activity. Central to this is the notion of professional failure, which translates to the vilification of the social workers involved. Describing these 'moral panics' Cooper suggests that they occur when the primary task systems designed to protect children and the covert task that protects people from the anxiety provoking reality of child abuse are no longer contained. This covert task, he asserts, prevents appropriate societal discourse about the emotionally painful reality of child abuse. Instead, it is much safer to seek to apportion blame. Whilst he describes the response of these moral panics as a form of public mourning, the reasons why some children trigger a breach of 'containment' compared to others remains unclear and in the main, unexplored.

Exploring issues of denial, Shoesmith (2016) invites us to consider psychoanalytic concepts to make sense of both the conscious and unconscious responses to these (p. 72). Splitting, projection, and projective identification form the foundation of the unconscious processes whereby fears or anxieties which cannot be 'defended against' are projected onto the other. The process of Othering is the identification of someone who does not belong to that particular group. These feelings may be experienced as hatred or fearful (Shoesmith, 2016, p. 77).

Denial can be both a conscious and unconscious process. Rustin (2005) considered how social workers 'enacted' unconscious defences when faced with the reality of the circumstances that led to the death of Victoria Climbié to avoid the unbearable psychological pain associated with the reality. They turned a 'blind eye' (p. 8).

Cooper (2005a) also writing about the Climbié argued that the professionals involved, and society at large may enter a state of 'true denial' as a conscious decision to avoid conflicts or dilemmas associated with some situations (p. 8).

Denial, I would argue, is both a conscious and unconscious defence that may lead to feelings of anger. Anger spans all psycho-social modalities. Almost everyone at some time experiences anger in some form or another, either as the angry actor or as witness to anger either directed at us or observed anger directed at others (Schieman, 2006). Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion

Anger and aggression may be linked. However, they are different emotions and it does not follow that either anger is expressed through aggression or aggression is displayed because someone is angry.

Schieman (2006) suggests that 'anger can be personally and socially destructive, bit it can also inspire, mobilise and, propel individuals to alter the undesirable circumstances of their lives' (p. 493). It can also offer an explanation into other people's behaviour; "they acted that way because they were angry".

From a sociological perspective Schieman (2006) argues that an exploration of anger provides 'unique knowledge about social relationships and conditions, the norms and expectations that occur within these domains, and dynamics in the wider society' (p. 493).

From a psychodynamic position anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats. It evokes powerful feelings and behaviours, which allow us to fight and to defend ourselves when we feel attacked (Williams, 2017). Thus anger can be described as a social defence mechanism.

Within work situation anger can also be used to exert power, authority and control. It often underpins the complex interpersonal dynamics especially in roles where workers have responsibility for the completion of tasks and goals, especially when aligned to the workers power to distribute rewards and punishments (Schieman, 2006, p. 496). Schieman (2006), therefore contends that anger is both a social emotion and a power emotion (p. 509). It seems to me that the connection between anger as an emotional state and social defences mechanisms is clearly made.

2.11 Grief and loss

In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published *On Death and Dying* where she outlined five stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Byock, updated 2014).

The following year, Bowlby and Parkes (1970) published their theory that offered four stages of grieving: numbness, yearning, disorganisation and reorganisation. The Bowlby and Parkes' model was developed from the psychoanalytic school of thought.

Bowlby and Parkes (1970) describe a number of prominent emotions under each stage and include shock and disbelief in their first stage, numbness; anger and guilt in the

yearning stage; anxiety, loneliness, fear and helplessness in the disorganisation stage, and acceptance and relief in the final stage, reorganisation (Bacchus, 2021). My observations from the narratives suggested that most participants were in the yearning and disorganisation stages.

Initially, both the Kübler-Ross and Bowlby and Parkes theories were described as linear processes, with each stage successfully navigated before an individual was able to move on to the next stage. However, further work (Kübler-Ross & Byock, 2014; Parkes, 1986; Worden, 1989) acknowledged instead that each stage may overlap with another stage, that those grieving may return to previous stages and that individuals may, in extreme circumstances, become stuck in a particular stage – abnormal grief reactions (Worden, 1989, pp. 53–64).

Citing Stroebe (2002), Bacchus describes how this non-linear process of grief can be defined as a dual model of coping with loss. It is an adaptive process caused by oscillating between restoration orientation (attending to life changes, distraction from grief, etc.) and loss orientation (grief work, avoidance of restoration, etc.) (Bacchus, 2021).

It is suggested that grieving proceeds gradually as acceptance occurs, which is accompanied by a reorganisation of one's life and beliefs. In normal circumstances the period of grieving lasts for around two years.

Bowlby and Parkes asserted that the experience of grief and loss is firmly situated in the quality of the attachment to the deceased. The more secure the attachment, the less likely the experience of abnormal grief reactions (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970)

2.12 Blame and scapegoating

Within organisations, apportioning blame to a specific individual – sometimes also referred to as 'scapegoating' – absolves the need for others in the system to consider their own behaviours and culpability. Viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, blame and scapegoating occurs through the processes of denial and Othering, through the projection of unwanted feelings and emotions. Psycho-socially, blame allow individuals to 'distance' themselves (physically and/or emotionally) from distressing events and to construct an explanation that they can privately or publicly promote (Shoesmith, 2016, p83). Comments such as 'I did not know' or '*they* did not tell me' [emphasis on *they* which locates not knowing on someone else] feature frequently when apportioning blame.

The need to blame is associated with a specific event or incident. Williams (2003) asserts that blame is not necessarily concerned with the truth of any alleged wrongdoing; rather, it focuses on the activities of those who blame when they are making such judgements of others' conduct. Often blame, or the pronouncement of guilt, is based upon a set of distorted assumptions.

In their paper, Ruch et al. (2014) explore the dynamics and practices of scapegoating that are closely associated with organisational blame culture. Focusing on

the Munro review of child protection: final report (Munro, 2011), the papers examine issues of individual blame and scapegoating that are so prevalent in organisational blame cultures and why they are so difficult to overcome or resist (pp. 313–314).

Munro's report (2011) considers wider issues of failure within children's social care and why numerous previous reforms, often following tragic incidents, have not brought about significant improvements to social work practice. Citing Muro (2011), Ruch et al. (2014) highlight the need for a shift from processes apportioning individual blame to processes that facilitate 'learning together' (p. 315).

The paper goes on to explore an understanding of scapegoating and its effects, the organisational conditions that encourage scapegoating, and offers solutions. Citing Dyckman and Cutler (2003), they outline various risk factors that contribute to scapegoating in organisations that centre around organisational crisis – a poor Ofsted outcome, as an example, and how scapegoating exhausts the organisations' ability to self-observe and problem-solve in a 'full and conscious fashion' (p. 318).

They suggest that using a systems approach with a focus on understanding rather than blaming is helpful to overcome scapegoating and look at psycho-social concepts – containment and social defences – which they argue are helpful in exploring how unconscious, anxiety-driven motivations result in dysfunctional responses that can manifest themselves in scapegoating behaviours. They draw on Bion's (1962) work on containment (p. 320) and how this influenced his thinking in respect of group relations. The way in which organisations function has a direct impact on how they hold and contain feelings of anxiety. The significance of what Bion described as the 'basic emotions', 'that

is the processes that underlie the emotional interactions in groups', is key in containing organisations (Riesenberg-Malcolm, 2006, p. 165).

Dyckman and Cutler (2003) argue that scapegoating within organisations often has the reverse effect. Rather than improvements, the impact of scapegoating often disables the organisation and its ability to look candidly at what went wrong and how to fix it. They suggest that psychoanalytic theory should be part of qualifying and post-qualifying training to help with an understanding of the impact of scapegoating in organisations (p. 320). Further, they suggest that scapegoating does play an important part in trust in organisations, with decision-makers being seen to distance themselves from errors or from people perceived to have made those errors. This defensive behaviour should, they argue, be resisted (p. 322).

They assert throughout that accountability and responsibility must not be replaced with blame and scapegoating and that systems failures should be seen as such but must not protect the proper application of accountability and responsibility (Ruch et al., 2014, pp. 313–327). The notions of blame and accountability are, I would argue, used interchangeably, and are thought generally to mean the same thing. They do not. It is right that where fault has been found, staff are held accountable to identify where things went awry and determine how they can be put right. Blame, on the other hand, is the emotional process that seeks to discredit and often dehumanise individuals as a projection so as to distance oneself from playing any part in what went wrong.

Arguably, poor Ofsted outcomes are always couched in the pejorative language of failure. It is of note that all inadequate Ofsted reports start with the sentence 'There are

widespread and serious failures...'. It could be questioned whether failure really is 'failure' if it leads to increased investment, greater internal and external stakeholder ownership and commitment and reviews of working arrangements and practice models leading to better outcomes.

Inspections are, by their very nature, extremely exposing, and whilst not political vehicles, they may lead to questions about the degree to which local politicians use their influence to address both poverty and inadequacy. It is often stated that one of the most important responsibilities for local authorities with social care functions is the 'protection' of their most vulnerable constituents. To be found wanting is politically embarrassing at the very least and may lead to public questions about individual or collective local political culpability, especially in the lead-up to elections. Therefore, it is unsurprising, I would assert, that the need to blame individuals rather than the organisation comes to the fore.

2.14 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduces a psychoanalytic and psychosocial theory that are relevant to my research questions. The chapter commenced by introducing the theoretical framework in which the study is situated, including the origins of key psychoanalytic concepts which have developed outside of a clinical setting and how the development of these have assisted my thinking alongside other psycho-social theories and constructs. I also consider social defence mechanisms. An exploration of the organisation context, including defining the primary task, the notions of power and authority together with comments on leaders and leadership and professional identity. The emotions of denial

and anger, which featured extensively in the study are explored. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the need to blame and scapegoat as a defensive response.

Chapter Three explores the methodology that was used in undertaking this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the overall aim of the study, and the research methods adopted, the rationale for the design of the study, along with data collection and analysis techniques. The design of the study directly addresses the research questions. It provides rationale for the inclusion of autoethnographic data and the use of the free association narrative interview in a modified form.

The chapter considers the epistemological and ontological positions, and the theoretical positions adopted. It explores how participants were recruited, including commenting on the complexities involved in this and the issues for ethical consideration. The chapter also considers my own circumstances and researcher influence, positionality and reflexivity, including ethical considerations in relation to my dual role as a researcher and a contributor to the study.

3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Positions

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that there are 'two conceptions of social reality' that are faced by researchers in the planning of their study, and within these different conceptions lie a range of logical assumptions – ontological, epistemological and methodological. They suggest that it is the researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and their knowledge (epistemology), that influence how knowledge is acquired (methodology).

These two conceptions can be characterised by either of the two following epistemological positions – positivism or interpretivism. Positivism holds that knowledge can be discovered through observation and measurement, and that reality is objective and exists independently of our beliefs or interpretations. Positivism is more suited to a quantitative methodology.

Interpretivism holds that knowledge is constructed through our experiences, reality is socially constructed and that it is impossible to separate the observer from the observed. It focuses on subjective experience, meanings and interpretations, which is central to qualitative methods.

Ontologically, my research adopts a constructivist position, where reality is socially constructed and the observer and observed are inseparable. Constructivism says that all human knowledge is a social construct and we cannot know anything outside the world that our societies have constructed - the mental pictures we carry - of our world (Adom et al, 2016).

Constructivism is a paradigm that promotes unique ontological and epistemological alignment. The ontology of constructivism, for example, is often referred to as relativism, or the idea that reality is made up of "multiple, tangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form and context on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110-111). On the other hand, we must ask how a constructivist would come to know those multiple realities, i.e., the epistemology of constructivism. In this sense, most constructivists would align with a subjective

epistemology in which "knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective" (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Constructivism is a paradigm which affords particular ontological and epistemological beliefs.

My study is formulated using a flexible design methodology (Robson, 2011, pp. 130–160). It is based on generating qualitive data through case studies using narrative interviews. My research follows an interpretive, hermeneutic constructivist approach (Peck & Mummery, 2017). I was aware of an internal bias, based upon my own experiences, thus it was important that my approach would be to gather data and let them speak for themselves. It was making sense of individual participants' stories and the connections to the other stories that was central to the study.

3.3 Psycho-social Position

This study sought to understand the lived experience through a psycho-social lens, drawing upon, in part, psychoanalytic theory and construct. It goes 'beneath the surface' (Cooper, 2005b) to make sense of the narratives. Cooper asserts that 'the theory that helps to make meaning of the data must be allowed to "arrive" because the "fit" is good'. Further 'the data lead to the selected theory not vice versa' (Cooper, 2018a, p. 229).

Wendy Hollway (2009) is at the forefront of the development of psychoanalytically informed psycho-social research methodology, whereby anxiety and unconscious processes will impact on what the research participant will disclose. This thinking was central in the choice of data collection and analysis.

This psycho-social approach uses a mix of psychoanalytic, constructivist and sociological epistemology, which supports the researcher to make sense of the meaning of the data. An example would be the use of psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference. This construct, described below, was significant in my role as researcher-participant. Issues in relation to transference and countertransference within my research are considered further in 3.14. Transference and countertransference (Freud & Breuer, 1895) is helpful to my understanding of the intersubjective relationship between the researcher and the participant (Duncan & Elias, 2020).

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) caution, however, that with psycho-social research 'we should refer to "psychoanalytically informed" methods and concepts, rather than "psychoanalytic", in an effort to make sure that our use of terms, such as "free association", "interpretation", "transference", "counter transference", and the idea of unconscious processes, is not identical to their use in clinical psychoanalysis' (p. 115).

Psycho-socially, Froggett (2002) draws a distinction between social constructionism, whose focus is on conscious and internal unconscious processes described by psychoanalytic concepts. With social constructivism, the focus is on discourse or the joint (social) activities that transpire between people. She argues that the latter will be devoid of meaning if 'they are disconnected from their anchors in experience' (pp. 134- 136)

Carpenter and Brownlee (2017) explore constructivism as a conceptual framework for social work treatment. Their paper explores the history of constructivism in the development of psychological theories of learning citing, among others, Piaget's

theory of children development, cognition and intelligence (p.98). Later, they consider how constructivism has 'been making its way quietly along the path of social work theory, but only recently recognised as such' (p.99). They assert that 'all theoretical frameworks that stress the importance of the individuals internal processes, especially perception and cognition, for understanding human behaviour have kinship with constructivism' (p.99).

They posit, as one tenet of their argument, a theoretical position of 'constructivism and emotions' (p.108). Citing Clore and Ortony, they state that a constructivist position would suggest that 'emotions are emergent conditions of reflecting multiple modalities of effective reactions to psychologically important decisions (Clore & Ortony, 2013, p.336). Of note, is that Carpenter and Brownlee make two significant points from a constructivist position. Firstly, that the emotional themes we encounter within our life experiences become embedded internally in how we interpret issues, which lead to how we organise, interpret and communicate our own personal stories and life experiences. Secondly, we use these emotional schemas to 'infuse meaning and reorganise events into emotional vignettes' (p.109). They suggest that these 'schemas' are not static and change based on our experiences in the 'social word' (p.109). However, what is crucial, they suggest, is that during the retelling of stories we infuse such emotion and passion into them that the 'listener' may feel some of these emotional too (p109).

A constructivist approach underpins two significant parts of my research. Firstly, during the transcription phase. Transcription of each interview was more than the simple process of creating a verbatim record of what was said. Each record was annotated with verbal and visual clues as I sought to get behind the meaning of the story. Secondly, the

approach was adopted during the formation of my discussion chapter. Analysis of the data was undertaken using a thematic approach, however of equal importance was to understand and make sense of the themes; what they may mean and why. This approach, I assert, allows us to make sense of what that data is telling us (Cooper, 2018b). This is explored further in 3.12.

3.4 Research Design

My research methodology is one that encourages my research participants to tell their story through the use of a narrative inquiry model. Narratives, or the telling of stories, provide both the participants and the researcher with the best way of representing and understanding their experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative research allows each participant to decide where they want to start their stories and focus on the parts that are important to them (Andrews et al., 2013). Narrative inquiries – making sense of situations through the telling of stories – are more than just an opportunity to gather a linear verbal account of an event, thought or set of circumstances but rather an opportunity to understand the significance of what is being told (Chataika, 2005). I am interested in both the conscious and unconscious narratives at play.

I was drawn to two data collection methods, namely the biographic narrative interpretive method (BNIM) and the free association narrative interview approach (FANI), both of which have a strong grounding in psycho-social research.

The BNIM provides a model for both data collection of historical biographical data and lived experiences over time and the interpretation (analysis) of these data, although it is possible to employ other analysis methods (Wengraf, 2004).

Created by Hollway and Jefferson, the free association narrative interview (FANI) approach draws upon psychoanalytic concepts of free association – that is, where the research participant freely tells their story and 'unconscious connections will be revealed' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 315). What the stories tell us is discussed in chapter five – discussion.

Similarities exist between the two methods within the research context insofar as both offer a nuanced exploration of unconscious communications, intersubjectivity and defences (Watkins, 2022, p. 58). The focus within the BNIM method draws more widely upon the historical, family and interpersonal perspectives, which was less necessary for my study. As a result, I decided to use elements of the FANI method.

The FANI method promotes four key concepts to enable participants to share their 'meaning frame' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, pp. 32–34):

- Open-ended questions
- Elicit stories
- Avoiding 'why' questions
- Following up respondents' ordering and phrasing

The use of open-ended questions is thought to elicit a narrative characterised by emotional motivations rather than rational intentions. Open-ended questions reveal the

participants' own 'meaning frame', whereas closed questions may distort their views (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013)

The second principle, 'elicit stories', refers to the link with the psychoanalytic concept of free association. Open-ended questions encourage participants to tell their own stories whilst the researcher actively listens. Reviewing the narratives helps the researcher understand why participants choose to focus on certain areas and not others through the use of the psychoanalytical concepts of splitting, projection, transference and countertransference (Clarke & Hoggett, 2018).

Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) third concept is the avoidance of 'why' questions. It is suggested that participants may distort their response to 'why' questions to one to which a meaning can be attached. An analysis of the meaning comes later in the process (Clarke & Hoggett, 2018).

The final concept refers to participants' ordering and phrasing within their narratives. The use of active listening skills and attention to unspoken events can be followed up in the order they were shared. They assert that it remains important to continue to use 'open-ended' questions in follow-up questions and where possible use participants' own words or phrases so as not to be seen to be offering interpretations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

Drawing upon Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theories regarding defences against anxiety, Hollway and Jefferson introduce the researcher to the concept of the 'defended subject' (2008, p. 299), where a participant's response to specific questions can be skewed by an unconscious need to defend against anxiety. It is the understanding of these

defences and how they play out in the interview that allows the understanding of the gestalt – 'that is the whole is greater than the sum of parts' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 306). Later, in an updated chapter, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) state: 'Free associations defy narrative conventions and enable the analyst to pick up on incoherences (for example, contradictions, elisions, avoidances) and accord them due significance' (p. 34). They suggest unconscious dynamics to avoid or reframe anxieties as a defence against them, which highlights an emotional response to the narratives.

Whilst the FANI can lend itself to historical, biographical accounts, for the purposes of my research this is not key and could possibly lead to easier identification of the participants. The adoption of some of the key concepts of the FANI method allow participants to identify for themselves the starting point for their narratives without the need for these to be framed within a rigid and linear timeline.

Reporting on his doctoral research, Archard (2020b) reflects on the use of the psychoanalytically informed interview approach in psycho-social research. Specifically, he considers the use of the Hollway & Jefferson (2013) free association interview narrative method (FANI), which he asserts 'is grounded in a theorisation of the research subject as a "defended psychosocial subject" and a combination of Kleinian psychoanalytic and discursive psychology' (Archard, 2020b, p.2).

Criticism of the Hollway & Jefferson (2013) FANI method as a psycho-social research approach was (and still is, by some commentators) inherently located in the complexities of psychoanalytic concepts and theories that underpin their use in a clinical setting and how these same concepts may be applied in a research context. As an

example, Archard (2020b), states that a definition of what is meant by interpretation will need to be initially considered as a key issue. He asserts that within a research context the sharing of the researchers initial analysis is an important tool to ensure the validity in qualitative research. However, the use of the psychoanalytic concepts in research may make assumptions that the participant is not aware or in touch with their own perceptions and meanings of the event(s) and whose responses should be considered as 'defended' (p.5). Archard (2020b) articulates that in therapy, 'the patient's response is critical to ascertaining the validity of an interpretation. In research, it is found in the way of an interpretation ("illuminates") other data (p.6).

Another key consideration is the difference between therapy and research. In therapy the patient is seeking help in making sense of their current situation which will require an exploration of unconscious feelings and insights. In a research context, it is important that we do not expose participants to 'insights' that they may not want to or be prepared to explore (Archard, 2020b, p.5)

Archard (2020b) asserts that the use of the FANI method has tended to be inconsistent with social work research, especially by those that do not have clinical training in applied psychoanalytic theory. He reflects that other studies that have been more critical of the use of the FANI method as a legitimate psycho-social research method have tended to disregard how the approach is alive to the socially constructed nature of what is said in the interviews, and how the 'positions adopted by the participants in interviews need to be thought about a reflective of different available social discourses' (p.4).

Archard (2020b) comments that he has come to agree that the development of psycho-social studies allows for a more 'critical and reflexive engagement with psychoanalysis in social work' which supports how we view the resituating of psychoanalytic concepts outside the clinical context and how the use of some of these concepts can be valuable in psycho-social research (p.4). It is important that researchers retain a clear separation of psychoanalytic concepts being applied to clinical work and research.

In essence, the use of the FANI method in this study does not seek to position it as a psychoanalytic research project but acknowledges the use of psychoanalytic concepts and practices in making sense of the participants lived experiences. This, I suggest, provides a helpful framework to understand and make sense of the data. As reported elsewhere, Froggett (2022) suggests that psychoanalytic concepts add much to psychosocial research. Archard's argument for the use of an adapted model of the FANI method is compelling.

3.5 Participation Strategy

The identification and recruitment of participants was straightforward in design but ultimately, for several reasons, much more complex in delivery.

Across England, there are 152 local authorities responsible for ensuring and overseeing the delivery of social care services for children. Between November 2013 and August 2018, each of these local authorities was inspected by Ofsted, at least once, using the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) methodology (Ofsted, 2017). Twenty-one local

authorities were reinspected using the SIF methodology, of which seven received an inadequate judgement on both occasions. Three local authorities were subject to a reinspection during the SIF programme due to external factors, of which only one received an inadequate judgement as a result of these thematic inspections. Overall, 19 local authorities received an inadequate inspection outcome over the life of the SIF inspection programme.

The initial participation strategy was to invite senior leaders that had found themselves displaced following the inspection outcome due to an inadequate judgement.

The potential cohort was the statutory Director of Children's Social Care (DCS) and their immediate direct report.[8]

It was straightforward to identify the local authorities that received an inadequate judgement as a spreadsheet has been maintained of all the SIF inspection outcomes and was published on the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) website.

Freedom of information (FOI) requests were sent to 18 of the authorities in receipt of an inadequate judgement seeking the following information: the names of the DCS at the time of the inspection, six months after the inspection and at one year further on. The same information was requested for the names of the 'tier 2' leaders at the same intervals.

[8] I refer to these as tier 2 managers as these posts had a different title across the various local authorities.

At the time these requests were made, the country was coming out of the initial Covid lockdown with significant restrictions during the summer of 2020, followed by further national lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021. As a result, there were significant delays in receiving responses to my requests, with, in some circumstances, several follow-up requests needing to be made. Over time, I was provided with all the information requested from the 19 local authorities.

From the information received it was clear that I was not going to be able to identify only those leaders that had been displaced as a direct result of the inspection outcome as it was unlikely that I would be able to qualify this assumption and, in any event, my search for participants had widened to simply identifying those leaders in post at the time of the inspection. However, it was interesting to note that at the time of the first published monitoring visit, only nine of the DCSs that were in post at the time of the inspection (47%) remained in post, and this decreased to four (21%) for tier 2 leaders.[9] No inferences are made specifically in relation to these data.

I excluded three local authorities from my project because one was the authority where I had been employed at the time of the inspection, another was an authority where I had previously been directly managed by the (now) DCS, and the last was an authority that was subject to extensive government intervention where it was evident that there had been a large number of short-term interim appointments to the senior leadership roles.

As the leadership data were received, and using a range of search techniques, I was able to identify contact details for nine DCSs and six tier 2 leaders. Contact was

[9] For a definition of a 'monitoring' visit, please see the footnote on page 13.

made with each of these officers via email, which included a comprehensive information sheet. Where there was no response a follow-up email was sent.

It was disappointing that from these contacts only two positive responses were received from officers who were employed as a DCS at the time of inspection, and three who were employed in tier 2 roles. As participant agreement was obtained, initial interviews were arranged and undertaken so as not to further delay the project (please also see 3.9).

After careful consideration, it was agreed that I would extend participation to tier 3 officers – with direct reports to tier 2 officers and part of the senior social care leadership team. To avoid delay, I made a direct approach to six tier 3 officers, who were unknown to me but whom I was able to identify through my extended professional network, two of whom agreed to participate in my research.

3.6 Challenges in the Recruitment of Participants

An important consideration when undertaking research is to ensure that the proportion of eligible participants is considered sufficient to influence an acceptance that the sample represents the population of the study. It is suggested that there is a distinction between those who fail to respond or refuse to participate following a direct approach and those who do not enrol following an open, published invitation. Retention of participants, once recruited, is also important, so early engagement, which lends itself to continuing participation, is crucial (Patel et al., 2003). Dowling and Wiener (1997)

suggest that the recruitment of participants, particularly in qualitative research, can be challenging and often not properly reported in studies.

This project faced several hurdles in recruiting participants. Firstly, the possible cohort of both DCS and tier 2 officers was small within the defined characteristics for inclusion. This was reduced by the exclusion of three local authorities. Secondly, the cohort was further reduced as I was unable to establish contact details for five DCS and ten tier 2 officers – the consequence being that I could only access 15 (47%) of the potential cohort of 32 officers. Thirdly, following a direct approach via an email inviting participation, I was only able to engage with five DCS or tier 2 officers who agreed to participate in the research (one who subsequently withdrew following the first interview), which represents 16% of the possible participants reduced to 13% following the withdrawal of one of the participants.

The research participant group was subsequently expanded to include tier 3 officers in a local authority's children's social care senior leadership team, and through direct contact I was able to recruit an additional two participants (33%).

Potential participants were identified by direct contact where contact details were available. Where no response was received, a follow-up email was sent. Several potential participants were no longer in the same role in the inspected authority that they were in at the time of the inspection, although some had moved on to equivalent roles in other authorities, while others appeared to be in roles with less responsibility elsewhere. There was a small cohort whose professional whereabouts could not be established.

In planning the research, consideration was given to ensuring that participants who had been displaced could take part without breaching any agreements such as a confidentiality clause. The research information sheet was explicit in raising this as a consideration for participants and pointing out that they needed to consider any potential implications for them.[10]

There are a number of possible reasons for limited participation in this project. Firstly, the period of study is relatively lengthy. During the five years covered in the project there were factors, such as the passage of time, current roles and personal priorities, that may have influenced the willingness to participate. Secondly, for some, there may also have been specific legal obstacles or agreements that prevented participation. Finally, there may have been concern about the value of the research on an individual level – evoking thoughts and memories that may be amplified and unwanted, or a view that the value of research is limited in its possible impact and influence.

It is not known whether avoidance of participation was due to concerns about possible repercussions. It is also possible that for some, they had moved on from the inspection outcome, given the passage of time (either from remaining in post or through new roles), and did not see the value in participating. Whilst assurances were provided that all identifying information would be removed from narratives to protect the confidential integrity of the data, it is also acknowledged that descriptions of individual circumstances may result in the identity of individual participants becoming known. It is

[10] There is a general concern that the confidentiality clause are used in settlement agreements to prevent ex-employees from 'whistleblowing', primarily in cases of harassment or discrimination in the workplace, however with a growing body of evidence suggesting that they are being used more widely by public bodies to silence workers from raising concerns about mismanagement in general. 'This type of "gagging" clauses benefits the employers and discourages employees from disclosing any misconduct' (Oprea, 2021).

of note that one early participant withdrew from the project following the initial interview, citing that they felt that the process of sharing her story was too exposing.

3.7 Autoethnographic Perspective

The genesis of my research is firmly embedded in my own story, as outlined in the opening chapter, and it was important to me that this story would be captured as part of the study. However, the ability to share and own my story is not without difficulty due to the constraints imposed by a confidentiality clause I agreed to when I left my previous employment.

Autoethnography arose out of field ethnography as a way to include the researcher's experiences and insights more directly into accounts of the subject being studied. Like autobiography, memoir and creative non-fiction, autoethnography actively and reflexively uses writing as an integral part of research and as a primary method of inquiry. In other words, autoethnographers invoke and use the discovery available in the writing process, using writing as a research practice that drives inquiry rather than as a "mopping up" activity after research has been conducted (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Autoethnography, simply put, is an observational, participatory and reflexive research method that uses writing about the self. Autoethnography, as a research tool, may stand on its own but often sits alongside other narratives to amplify or add context to an area of enquiry. In other words, autoethnography is an observational data-driven phenomenological method of narrative research that seeks to provide insight into

experiences that are compelling, striking and evocative (showing or bringing forth strong images, memories or feelings).

Convention, I would suggest, dictates that it would be the norm for autoethnographic data to be presented in a way where they were easily identifiable or attributable to the autoethnographers. However, due to the need to ensure compliance with the conditions imposed by the confidentiality clause, my 'story' is anonymously presented in Chapter Three. The presentation of the data through identified themes allows for my data to add to those of the other participants in a way that allows for additional context.

3.8 Data Gathering

This project was undertaken whilst the UK was in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. This, I would assert, meant that the research was conducted against a backdrop of challenges that were unique to all research undertaken during this period of time and which required adaptation to ensure that the high quality and integrity of the research were maintained (Tremblay et al., 2021). Examples of these challenges included the fact that many of the leaders who agreed to take part had limited time and availability due to other pressing professional demands, which meant that on two occasions I needed to rearrange interviews.

Arrangements for the interviews were made as participants gave consent and occurred within a relatively short time frame, which meant that for a significant period I was unsure whether I would recruit enough participants to ensure that the study would be

viable. Due to the ongoing and often shifting restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were held virtually using Zoom at a time convenient to participants. Interviews started with the same question: 'I'm interested in your experience of the Ofsted inspection and wondered if you could tell me about it?' Follow-up questions within the interview were as 'open-ended' as possible, avoiding 'why questions' and following up narratives using the participants' 'ordering and phrasing designed to elicit further narratives' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 33). Additional questions usually included phrases such as: 'Can you tell me….? What was that like? How did that feel? What did you do?'

Interviews were without time constraints, thereby allowing participants to determine the length, and were video- and audio-recorded (Zoom) with the consent of the participants. Whilst this provided an opportunity for the researcher to record the interviews using a combined visual and audio tool, which assisted at the transcription stage, I am conscious that benefits that come about through face-to-face meetings were not possible. In addition, on one occasion the connection was lost during the interview, which, whilst it was restored relatively quickly, did interrupt the flow of the information being presented. Undertaking interviews virtually did allow for wider participation; the logistics of travelling across the country may have been a limiting factor for research participation otherwise. A significant benefit, however, was the video recording. The process of recording meant that the software captured a visual image of the person speaking. This allowed for the interviews to be viewed at a later date to explore the non-verbal communication and cues, enabling a much more rounded analysis of the data.

The FANI method suggests a second interview, normally scheduled a week after the first. The purpose of the second interview is to provide an opportunity to check and

seek further evidence. The process was that the initial interview would be listened to, and notes would be made to construct a set of structured questions to triangulate or test elements from the first interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 40). However, for reasons explored in 3.13, none of the participants wished to take part in a second interview.

My autobiographical interview was conducted prior to any of the participants' interviews. This was a deliberate decision as I did not wish my story to be unconsciously distorted or influenced by participants' narratives. My recorded narrative was facilitated by an associate who was familiar with the FANI method.

3.9 Transcription

Immediately after each interview, an audio MP3 file was created using the Zoom software. These files were uploaded to an automated online transcription service, which produced, in Word format, a reasonably accurate transcription. Whilst automated transcription is sophisticated, and of significant time-saving benefit to those that do not possess audio typing skills, it is not sensitive to accents, pronunciation and names/locations. The draft transcript was then edited using the recorded video as the source reference. Although time-consuming, there were two additional benefits to this approach. Firstly, I was able to redact sensitive or identifiable information as part of the editing process, and secondly, I was able to annotate the transcript with the non-verbal and visual cues.

3.10 Sharing Transcripts, Second Interviews, and Withdrawal of Consent

The decision to share the transcripts of the first interview with participants was taken early in the study design process. The rationale for this decision was twofold. Firstly, it was hoped that sharing would further my commitment to ensuring participant anonymity through ownership of the transcript and empowerment of controlling their own narratives. Secondly, it was felt that 'showing participants' transcripts might be extremely fruitful in achieving research objectives, such as engaging participants to reflect further on their first interview' (Forbat & Henderson, 2005, p. 1119). As part of the preamble, participants were informed that they would be sent the transcript of their interview.

Forbat and Henderson (2005) assert, however, that sharing transcripts may change the epistemological status to research where data are not directly shared as it changes the relationship between researcher and participants, especially if participants are able to edit or delete data, stating that this, 'at an epistemological level, might imply that the truth status of accounts may be up for grabs' (p. 1118).

The transcripts shared were fully redacted of any information that I felt would identify them. To protect the integrity of the data, participants were asked only to suggest further redactions if they contained appropriate or correct factual information.

The decision to share transcripts, by the very nature of the time frame for transcription, meant that it was not possible to offer second interviews with the recommended gap between interviews of a week. In most cases, transcripts were sent to

participants two to three weeks after their first interview, with an invitation to take part in a second interview. All bar one participant refused a second interview. One participant made minor changes to the transcript and returned it.

The participant who agreed to a second interview used this time to withdraw consent and exit the study. Despite the transcript being heavily redacted they felt that the data were still very exposing of them personally. It should be noted that the transcript was faithfully transcribed and contained only information with personal details heavily redacted. It is suggested that for this participant the 'hard copy, makes her story solid and static' (Forbat & Henderson, 2005, p. 1123), which may have played a part in their 'contemplating and reconsidering the emotional and sensitive nature of the interview' (Forbat & Henderson, 2005, p. 1124).

My reflections following the withdrawal of this participant were tinged with a degree of sadness. Her interview provided a vast amount of extremely rich data, which would have added greatly to the study. It is worthy of note that this participant had recently retired and had no plans to return to the profession in any guise. It is possible that reading her story may have distorted the reality that the end part of her career did not accord with her wishes to be remembered as a 'successful' manager.

Careful consideration was given to whether I could continue to apply the adapted FANI method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013) as a legitimate method of data collection in the absence of being able to undertake a second interview. The FANI method suggests that after the first interview in which the researcher interferes as little as possible, a second interview follows, where additional questions, examples or additional topics can be

explored. This initially was a concern. However, after considerable thought it is my contention that the lack of a second interview does not detract from the richness and relevance of the data from the first interview. All the first interviews were extensive, with participants speaking freely and at length.

It is, of course, difficult to assess whether a second interview would have provided additional data that would add significantly to the body of data. I believe that the quality of the data captured in the initial interviews stands on its own and has captured the voices and experiences of the participants. The data from the interviews with participants and subsequent analysis, I assert, add to a body of knowledge about the impact of a poor Ofsted inspection on senior children's social care leaders.

Mindful of the critique of the FANI method and how it could be adapted (Archard, 2020a), my desire to follow a psychoanalytically informed approach, and the possible significance of the concept of a 'defended subject' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008, p299), I felt that the use of an adapted FANI method was appropriate.

3.11 Analysis

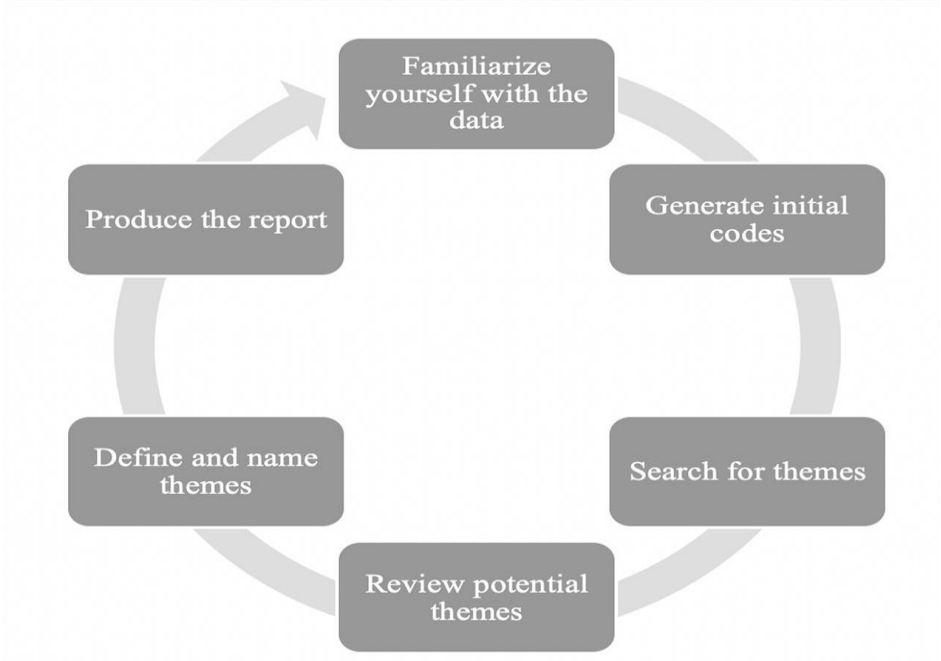
The FANI method supports analysis by drawing on psychoanalytic theories and writing pen portraits (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), which would have been problematic with my study due to the risk of exposing the identity of participants. Alternatively, researchers may choose to carry out thematic analysis (Clarke & Hoggett, 2018).

Thematic analysis is, as suggested, an inductive approach to identifying themes across the data. It is independent of theoretical frameworks and systematically identifies, organises and explores themes across the data, allowing the researcher to 'see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences' (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57).

Braun and Clarke (2012) have produced a step-by-step guide to thematic analysis, asserting the flexibility of the model, which allows the researcher to focus on either the whole data set or particular aspects, although they assert that it is possible to identify numerous patterns or themes as it is important that themes identified are relevant to the research question. Their approach comprises six stages.

Figure 2

Stages for Thematic Analysis



Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

A key area within supervision was how the thematic analysis could be expanded to include questions to be put to the data – what do those data tell us within the context of the themes identified. Cooper (2018b) clarifies his thoughts further when he declares his 'aversion' to research where participants are interviewed and 'the research is written up in loosely themed groupings of quotations from the research subjects' (p. 202) with no effort to make sense of these within a psycho-social context.

My primary research aim was to explore the lived experience of senior (social care) leaders who received a poor inspection outcome. To support this, I further sought to understand the emotional and professional impact of this judgement and how leaders come to terms with their experience.

I developed a set of additional questions to 'put' to the data:

- What was the participants' experience of being a senior manager?
- What was the participants' experience of Ofsted inspections?
- What constitutes a poor inspection outcome?
- Who or what prevented participants from expressing their views if they had concerns?
- How did leaders articulate their feelings and to whom?
- What were the internal and external support mechanisms?
- What might 'recovery' look like?

I commenced the analysis by reading through each transcript a number of times. Each question was put to the individual transcripts, which generated a significant amount of focused data from which I 'generated' initial codes – in simple terms, the parts of the data

that appeared to be relevant to the additional questions. From these, I began to look at similarities and collate these together as the beginning of identifying emerging themes.

Stage four required exploration of these emerging themes across all the data contained in each transcript. Some initial themes were discarded at this point as they were either not sufficiently salient across all of the data or lacked relevance to the research questions.

Defining and naming the themes involved a careful exploration of the data that identified the extracts to support the identified theme. This stage required careful analysis of the language used by participants and an interpretation of the meaning of their narratives – a complex process due to the unstructured nature of the data collection method. It is asserted that thematic analysis is not a passive process, insofar as the emergence of themes s concerned; it requires careful analysis of both apparent and latent meanings from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

An example of this was the need to make connections between the comments made in the narratives and the emerging themes, as they were not always immediately evident. My 'insider' knowledge was particularly helpful in this regard.

3.12 Credibility and Reliability

Noble and Heale (2019) describe reliability as being key to increasing the credibility and validity of research findings. 'Credibility refers to trustworthiness and how believable a study is; validity is concerned with the extent to which a study accurately reflects or evaluates the concept or ideas being investigated' (Noble & Heale,

2019, p. 67). Denzin (1998) suggests four types of triangulation: data, observer, methodological and theory. ‘Data’ is the use of more than one data source; ‘observer’ is the use of more than one observer in the study; ‘methodological’ considers both qualitative and quantitative approaches; and ‘theory’ considers theoretical perspectives. Adherence to one or more of these helps counter concerns about validity.

In my research, data were obtained from more than one participant. The data collected were then shared, by way of transcripts, with participants, who had an opportunity to make factual corrections.

Bi-weekly doctoral continuation seminars with peers provided a space for presentation of extracts of my data and a space to collectively think about its meaning using psycho-social concepts. Similarly, monthly supervision was invaluable in assisting with helping me understand the nuances of participants’ stories and challenge my own assumptions, values and beliefs; a crucial necessity in ensuring a reflective researcher position was maintained.

3.13 Researcher Influence, Positionality and Reflectivity

I embarked on this research from a position of knowledge and direct experience and thus may be considered an inside researcher.

An inside researcher is defined as someone who is part of the system in which the research is undertaken (Chammas, 2020; Merton, 1972). The researcher comes with

insider knowledge, a common language, experience and a shared (professional) identity, as in the case of my project (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Whilst there are benefits to sharing a common understanding of the nature of the tasks being researched, the language used and an ease of acceptance of commonality of the issues shared by both the researcher and the participant (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), there are also risks associated with this level of knowledge, compared to research studies undertaken by researchers who are not familiar with the day-to-day minutiae of the task, where interpretation and analysis of the data may be skewed (positively or negatively) by pre-formed views (Jankie, 2004). Often the definition of an inside researcher in qualitative research is reserved for research undertaken in the researcher's day-to-day organisation or with participants with whom they have had a previous and/or ongoing relationship; thus, in these terms it could be asserted that I was an outside researcher (Merton, 1972).

However, whilst the research was not situated in the organisation where currently I work, my knowledge of both the organisations that participants worked in and my own direct experience of the topic being researched meant that I came to this project from a position of direct knowledge, which had the potential to skew the findings. I was alive to this issue throughout.

Chammas (2020) asserts that researchers need to be explicit, both to themselves and to the wider audience, in terms of their own positionality to the topic being researched. My own position, as outlined in 3.10, locates me as both a researcher and a participant. Watkins (2022) describes this insider-outsider position as 'betwixt and

between', where she compares her familiarity and being comfortable with the research topic to taking up an unfamiliar researcher position and the complexity of this fluidity (p. 107).

Researcher influence and reflexivity are intertwined. Reflexivity is about acknowledging your role in the research. As a qualitative researcher, you are part of the research process, and your prior experiences, assumptions and beliefs will influence this process.

My story, as outlined in the introduction, clearly reveals key aspects of my biography and how my experiences framed the research project, and, I would suggest, aids a wider understanding of the project as a whole. This identity both influences and is influenced by the research, and it is an understanding of this identity that provides confidence that the research is thorough and ethical (Harvey, 2013).

It is important to reflect that this study originates from a research interest based on my personal experience, and I have been mindful of this throughout. Watkins (2022) description of what she terms a 'betwixt and between' position, whilst a helpful description (which denotes an alternative to the traditional inside-outside research position), does not capture the intensity of emotional impact of this study.

As discussed earlier, Freud's description of 'transference', later expanded to include 'counter-transference' provides a helpful theory to explore the, at times, complex and conflicting, emotions I experienced undertaking this study.

Much of the data resonates with my own experience and often generated feelings of sadness, empathy, anger and disbelief, among other emotions. The need to both acknowledge these feelings and distance myself from them to be able to explore the data objectively was challenging. Identifying ways to deal with transference and countertransference included being aware of danger signs, monitoring self, and taking relevant material to both individual supervision and the group doctoral seminars.

3.14 Ethical Issues, Consent and Participant Anonymity

Ethical approval by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee for my study was confirmed in July 2020.

Underpinning all research is a professional and moral obligation to ensure, to the best of our ability, that participants are protected from harm. This is particularly important in narrative research as participants will be disclosing sensitive information in relation to their life stories. It is suggested that ethical consideration in qualitative research focuses on four key areas: whether the benefit of the research outweighs any potential harm, issues regarding anonymity and confidentiality, the role conflict between researcher and participant, and the importance of informed consent (Chataika, 2005). All these issues were explored in the submission to the ethics committee.

Of particular concern was the need to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, I was conscious that some participants may have entered into a settlement agreement with their previous employer as part of severance arrangements. Most agreements also contain a confidentiality clause that may make taking part in the

research difficult if their identity becomes known. I gave an undertaking that every effort would be taken to ensure that the research did not lead to participants' identity being disclosed, but I did feel that it was important to make it clear that participation was at their own risk and that they needed to be satisfied that they could do so without breaching any confidentiality agreements.

Narrative research, it is suggested, requires careful consideration, and there are clear risks that have to do with 'subtle and often unforeseeable consequences of writing about people's lives'…. and 'the emotional impact of having one's story reinterpreted and filtered through the lenses of (psycho)social research' (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 321). Researchers need to be mindful of their need to protect participants from harm, which may extend beyond the data collection interviews.

Information about the study, which included the disclaimer above, and consent forms were emailed to participants. Verbal consent was also obtained at the beginning of each interview.

3.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the aims of the study and the researchers' ontological and epistemological positions. It highlights the research design, the psychosocial position and how the research questions were developed. I explain the rationale for the data collection and data analysis methods, together with how my own story was captured and presented in the study. Difficulties in the recruitment of participants are commented upon.

Researcher influence, positionality and reflexivity are explored. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations. Chapter four identifies the key findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Overview

The chapter starts with brief demographic details about the seven participants who took part in the research study and an overview of the themes identified that go to the core of the research questions. Each of them is considered in detail with the associated extracts from the transcripts.

4.2 Description of the Participants' Details and Demographic Coding

An invitation to participate in the research was extended to officers with local authority children's services senior leadership team. It became apparent in identifying what stage of the study the participants were at that there were several different staffing structures and post titles in play. For example, in some authorities, the statutory role of Director of Children's Services (DCS) was undertaken by officers that also held the statutory role of Director of Adult Services (DAS). Not all staff who held the DCS role reported directly to the authority's chief executive, and in a minority of authorities the traditional DCS role had been split into separate commissioning and operational posts with different reporting lines.

Similarly, post titles were not consistent across all local authorities, especially at the tiers below the statutory DCS.

Therefore, for the purpose of reporting the findings, I have coded the statutory DCS position as tier 1, the posts that have direct responsibility for children's social care reporting to the DCS as tier 2 and finally the remaining members of the social care senior leadership team, reporting to tier 2 officers, as tier 3.

Of the seven participants, one was still in the same post at the time of interview as they were at the time of inspection, five had left their roles as a direct result of the inspection outcome and one had moved to a new job, which they said was not as a direct result of the poor inspection outcome.

It was agreed with participants that no information that could lead to their identity would be published as part of the research. Therefore, the biographical information is limited to the following:

Table 4

Outline of Participants

Participant	Gender	Role	Still in same role
P1	Male	Tier 2	No
P2	Male	Tier 1	Yes
P3	Female	Tier 2	No
P4	Female	Tier 3	No
P5	Female	Tier 2	No
P6	Female	Tier 3	No
P7	Male	Tier 3	No

4.3 Overview of Findings

The research aimed to explore and understand the lived experience of senior social care leaders of a poor Ofsted inspection judgement. The research considers the emotional and professional impact of an Ofsted Judgment of Inadequate and how leaders navigated their way, both emotionally and professionally, from this experience.

It draws upon each participant's lived experience, which was captured through participants telling their own story. The analysis identified eight overarching themes.

Table 5

Themes

	Participants' contributions						
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
1. Understanding the risk of failure	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
2. The ownership of the wider issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. The experience of the inspection							
I. Individual reflections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II. When the inspection unravelled	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
4. Responsibility, accountability and blame	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Experiences of anger and trust	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Feelings of loneliness and isolation	✓	✓	✓			✓	

7.	The impact on emotional well-being	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8.	How participants viewed the future	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

In addition to the overarching themes described, analysis of the data also suggested:

- Whilst all the participants had experienced inspection before, five of whom had held senior roles previously, almost all were relatively new to their current role in the authority inspected.
- Participants that were new in their current role felt that they were being held accountable for actions of previous post holders.
- Two thirds of the tier two leaders lost their jobs immediately on the publication of the report.
- All the tier three leaders remained in post for several months before they moved on.
- The only tier one leader who was part of the study remained in post.
- The tier one leader spoke more about his relationship with the chief executive and lead Member, which suggested that these relationships were beneficial in allowing him direct access to those ultimately responsible for his continuation in his role.
- The tier one leader had significantly more control over the narratives in relation to the inspection outcome and his future position.

4.4 Theme 1: Understanding the Risk of Failure

Being prepared for the inspection featured in all the interviews. The inspection follows a prescribed framework that clearly sets out how the inspection is to be managed and what specific evaluation criteria will be applied when coming to one of the four possible judgements, for both the overall effectiveness of services and the individual components that make up the overall judgement. All the participants were fully conversant as to what to expect and all had been in leadership roles, albeit some at a lower level of seniority and/or in a different local authority, during previous inspections. All the participants talked about how they were active participants in undertaking tasks that were clearly and exclusively about being 'inspection ready'. These tasks varied from additional case auditing, minor staff or service restructuring, increased visibility, specific inspection planning forums, as examples. These were often seen as separate or additional to their normal day-to-day operational and strategic responsibilities.

All except one of the participants had been in post for under 18 months prior to the inspection, with the exception being P1. This participant had been in post for almost three years at the time of the inspection. The two tier 3 participants had been employed by their authorities for longer, but in lower-level posts, and had been promoted to tier 3 posts approximately 18 months prior to the inspection.

Almost all participants talked about their assessment of the degree of risk of failure. For some this was based on their own analysis of the quality and efficacy of professional practice when they took up the role. What was clear was the importance that the participants attached to their assessments:

P2: *So I arrived and it was fairly soon after that I realised it really wasn't like they thought it was; they thought that they were a good authority, there were no issues and I could see that that wasn't the case and having just come from a place that had just been judged inadequate under the SIF I had some personal experience of that and a degree of anxiety around it.*

P2 was an experienced Director of Education who had moved from an authority that experienced a poor children's social care inspection outcome. He had first-hand knowledge of the impact of a poor outcome both on peers and the wider organisation.

P3: *I arrived and within a month, I was quite clear that they were not good. They were struggling to be requires improvement (RI*[11]*). There are several key issues and I started to have that conversation and that dialogue…. and I was extremely unpopular for having that conversation….., saying I'm not sure that you are going to get your RI let alone a good.*

P5:*The handover was relatively short; I think it was a week or two and I was given a list of things that needed doing….. it wasn't a plan of any description. They had a visit which had given them some positive indications, ... Ofsted didn't say this, but it was received as we're nearly good and you know, just a bit more effort folks and it'll be great.*

[11] Require improvement (RI) is the second-lowest Ofsted judgement.

P5: *So, I got there and thought pretty much straight away…. they used the Hackney model*[12]*, you know the reclaiming social work and it didn't seem to be working at all to me, but they're totally wedded to it. I got immediately absorbed in trying to put in place an improvement plan, based on the previous full inspection. They hadn't got one, there was no sense they needed to improve.*

Neither P3 or P5 had operated at a tier 2 level prior to taking up their appointments immediately before the inspection. Both stated that they had been attracted to the posts on the basis that the organisation was predicting a good inspection outcome. Both felt that they had been misled and commented that they probably would not have accepted the positions if they had really known the extent of the shortcomings that they found once they were in post.

Other participants highlighted that external validation had influenced their view that the risk of failure was omnipresent:

P1: *I arrived, when (redacted) was in a pretty perilous state, they just got through their last inspection with requires improvement, almost on the basis that it had got new DCS, and so things were going to get better. It was based on potential; it certainly wasn't on the basis of anything we were doing…. it wasn't in a good place.*

[12] Reclaiming social work (often referred to as the Hackney Model), was a whole-system service reform that aimed to deliver systemic social work practice in children's services. Key elements included: (1) in-depth training; (2) small units; (3) group systemic supervision; (4) clinician support; and (5) enhanced administrative support.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fa41353d3bf7f03afd7b5ba/Reclaiming_Social_Work

P1 moved from a local authority that had been judged as outstanding. He states that he was aware that the authority he was appointed to had recently received an average inspection outcome but felt that he had an opportunity to make his mark.

Reflecting on the period leading up to the inspection, P7 stated:

P7: *I think we knew that there was a risk of failure, but it was unspoken with the 'public' view being that we were a strong RI with some good features. We were struggling with massive increases in demand for services with limited management capacity, including the absence of a DCS. The focus was not on quality services but how we were going to survive.*

Another participant, relatively newly appointed to a tier 3 post, commented:

P6: *I'd been in post for about nine months, when Ofsted came and did a front door monitoring visit and one of the things I'd been handed over by my previous line manager and I'd been told by the safeguarding board….. there would have been audits and reviews, independent audits and reviews done of the MASH*[13] *and that was a really good part of the service and we had nothing to worry about. And so Ofsted came in and they slated it.*

Throughout all the interviews participants were keen to share that they were able to accurately gauge that the level of optimism about a positive outcome was misplaced.

[13] MASH – multi-agency safeguarding hub. This refers to the part of the service that receives and triages referrals. Led by children's social care, it also includes practitioners from other agencies.

They believed that their ability to identify what 'good' or better looked like was a positive factor in relation to their leadership competencies. None felt that they had been appointed to posts that they did not possess the necessary skills to competently discharge the requirements of the role.

4.5 Theme 2: The Ownership of the Wider Issues

The extent to which the level of risk of inspection failure was articulated and owned more widely within the organisation was, perhaps unsurprisingly, dependent on the role of the participant, with tier 1 and 2 participants having more direct access to the DCS (if they were not the DCS), Chief Executive and elected councillors. Similarly, these post holders were more able to seek external support to both provide a diagnostic assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement and to engage staff in supporting an improvement plan.

Of note, however, was the experience of P1, who acknowledged that he did not seek direct support. He talks about the focus in the organisation of addressing austerity and of a missed opportunity:

P1: *Austerity was just kicking in, there was no money, the whole concentration was savings and I spent so much of my time with consultants; how were we going to save money, how were we going to reduce demand? I bought into that and I probably should have used my initial capital to say the senior management team is really thin, there is hardly any of us – so there is very little capacity.*

Later he said:

P1: *Just going back to my inexperience. The other thing I should've asked for was some mentoring or coaching…, you're arriving as if you're the one who knows all because you're coming from another authority; so someone of influence but actually, I don't…., I don't really know. I've done this marvellous interview, I'm bloody great…, but if I could advise myself, I would have said I think that there wasn't just enough resource.*

It would seem that P1 was viewed as a competent manager who had been recruited from a local authority that has received an outstanding judgement who would be aware of the expectations of his role. In reality, P1 described a set of circumstances where he felt out of his depth in finding a forum for getting his message across and heard.

In the final few months before the full inspection, P1 said that a new DCS had been appointed. Having been somewhat of a lone voice, he said:

P1: *And she came in and said you need some more help but she's also quite a tough character which I knew. She set some cats among some pigeons, but there was a much clearer view we need to improve; this is how we are going to improve – set up an improvement board…. so, it felt like she was on top of it. It wasn't that helpful, but some bits of it were.*

Similarly, P4 and P6 described circumstances where they were raising concerns about their ability to address identified shortcomings in practice against a backdrop of a lack of resources:

P6: *The director… was really clear about what needed to be done, but there just wasn't any appetite in the wider organisation……, we had to save a hundred and eight million or something ridiculous and they were just salami slicing services. I remember sitting in a meeting with some people from corporate and they were talking about cutting something and we were arguing against it as children services and one of the women turned around and said to me 'you've got to stop saying if you don't get all the resources you need children will die, you know none of us believe that' …. and then saying to her 'well you know what? It's not actually about whether or not children will die at the end of the day, even if you've got outstanding services, unfortunately, that will happen sometimes'. And she said, 'Oh, you've got no idea how relieved I am to hear you say that.' I said, 'On the other hand, Ofsted are going to come in here and inspect us at some point and if they think that we haven't got the resources to run a safe service, they'll find us inadequate. Local authorities find it really hard to recover from that place' and I just kind of left it there.*

In describing the period preceding the inspection, P4, who initially was in a more junior role having recently joined the organisation, said:

P4: *As things start to head towards the inspection you can see that nobody realises they are doing anything wrong…… I was on a panel and thinking, this is wrong and that is wrong. I can't help myself but be honest about it but (redacted) would be very slick about it and very organised, so you had this relatively balanced corporate parenting panel that isn't too awful in terms of the dynamics, but it was a bit crap in terms of not doing much.*

Her predecessor then left, and she was appointed to her new role on an interim basis. She describes feeling as though she was under the spotlight and needing to prove herself before she was offered the post on a permanent basis, during which time she did not want to rock the boat.

Her description of that period seems to suggest a period of impotence for her. She stated that she did not feel able to raise issues of concern as this may impact on being appointed to the post on a permanent basis.

P4: *You needed somebody to be much more bullish and say I'm not doing that unless you give me this kind of thing. He should have called the shots a bit more…..... I think a lesson for someone at that level is when you go into the job you need to be calling the shots about what you need and be clear that you're not staying unless you get it. I remember him having some battles about what he needed, and he wasn't winning them.*

P7, who had been in his role at that time for the longest out of all the participants, also described how it was almost impossible to raise concerns and observations in appropriate forums.

P7: *As part of austerity measures the statutory DCS had not been replaced when the previous postholder had left; the then AD was given the title of DCS and reported directly to the chief executive……, The CE didn't do detail and wasn't particularly approachable. In addition, there was a dysfunctional relationship between the [newly promoted] DCS and assistant director for strategy and business support with no one really taking any responsibility for inspection preparation. The DCS was a lone voice, desperately trying*

to keep her head above water in a role that was new to her, lacking support from her peers and her constant focus was on identifying savings when what was really needed was financial growth.

The other participants engaged in much more explicit endeavours to raise their assessment of the weaknesses that they had observed. However, this was not always well received or welcomed.

P2: *I then had this quite interesting situation where I thought that the situation was pretty bad, but the person that had been previously responsible for it was my boss and I remember writing a report about three months in setting out quite a lot of concerns that I had, and having shared that with my boss, as was, it was agreed that I'd change some of the tone of it, and for me when I look back in hindsight that was the one thing that I regret doing. I moved my concerns from the main body of the text into an appendix, so they were still there, but it was less impactful about the risks that the council took and were facing and I think that gave a view of comfort that was unhelpful and probably didn't help with some of the issues that we were going to face into the future.*

The degree to which others were prepared to listen and share ownership was clearly an issue. So much so:

P2: *We carried on for a little while and I said that I was still concerned and I asked an (external) colleague whether he would be willing to do a diagnostic, but they would only do so if there was an agreement from the staff, from the (redacted) who took a long time to make that decision.*

(Redacted) were an improvement partner; I knew (redacted) very well, and I trusted his judgement. They came in and I remember, just as an example of the openness and transparency, or lack of. I saw the person who was doing the work at an ADCS meeting, and I said to her how's it going and she said haven't you heard? I've been seeing people because it's been so bad, and nobody had briefed me; nobody had told me and then a couple of weeks later I get a report that's been written that just was absolutely damning, really, really damning saying loads of things are wrong.

I share it with the chief exec. We agree that we need to take some decisive action……. So, I then took direct control; direct line management. We introduced an improvement programme and (redacted) carried on working with us as improvement advisors. We started to progress that, we did lots of work to try and get things better and overall……. and I brought in some other managers… then we had the call from Ofsted saying that they were coming in, …. Our best hope was 'requires improvement', and I said to members that was my hope, but it could be worse.

This experience was mirrored by the two other participants. In both cases they had joined organisations where those not directly involved in the day-to-day operational responsibility of the department seemed to be unaware of the precarious position that the council was in. It is, of course, difficult to know, prior to the issues being raised by the participants, whether this was because the messages were not being delivered in a way that the risks were not being heard in the context of the diverse nature of the responsibilities that the council delivers against or whether the messages were missing.

P5: *I had already brought a team in to do some work because I said to the DCS and the chief exec this is inadequate, we're going to get inadequate if Ofsted come. This is in a real poor shape, and I did present to the chief exec, and we presented to the lead member our findings and that things need to be sorted. The chief exec was outraged, and you know exasperated about what had gone on. The DCS didn't come to the presentation on how poor the practice was, she said she had a pressing engagement she'd got to go to which turned out to be the dentist. So, before Ofsted landed, they'd heard me say this is inadequate, and then it was 'oh my God how are we going to sort this out, Ofsted are coming'. I put a PowerPoint together which basically fell on our sword saying we know it's crap, but we're going to fix it…. I'm going to… etc.*

Unlike other participants, P3 was facing dissent from her direct manager. She had already started to have discussions within weeks of her arrival about what she had uncovered, including serious concerns about services being provided to a specific group of vulnerable children. She was worried not only about the quality of the services being provided but also whether they were being delivered in way that was compatible with the lawful discharge of its statutory responsibilities. It would appear that this concern and others were not well received:

P3: *The DCS fundamentally disagreed with me, and said we've done loads of work. I said, yes, I can see you've done loads of work, but I'm telling you you're not (good), and one of the issues was that they had done something…, illegal is a strong word, but you'll get what I mean. There was a clear narrative through management meetings of me saying 'you're not where you think you are' and as I say, that makes you unpopular but it's not about that it's about the kids. Despite this I'm not sure that my assessment was ever fully*

accepted as accurate or ever discussed, other than maybe a passing comment, with the chief executive or lead member.

The experience of the participants' voices being heard was an important element in all the narratives. For some it feeds into the injustice that they felt when decisions were made post inspection. All participants were relatively new to their post, and all had articulated issues that they had professionally assessed as leaving their organisation at risk of a poor or very poor inspection outcome.

4.6 Theme 3: The Experience of the Inspection

The experience of the inspection was common across all the interviews. This theme centred around two subthemes: the process of the inspection and feelings when the inspection began to unravel. What was also common was the immense pressure that all participants felt. Each manager took personal responsibility for ensuring that the needs and wants of the inspectors were met, as well as providing individual and collective support to staff that were directly involved. It was clear from the narratives that staff worked long hours during the inspection even when this conflicted with personal responsibilities. However, participants fully accepted that the inspection would and did place additional demands on them personally, particularly as it was business as usual throughout with their normal complex responsibilities still having to be a significant focus of their working day.

Ofsted inspections follow a clear framework that applies consistently across all local authorities. All the participants were directly involved in the inspection, including

being interviewed as part of the evidence-gathering process. In addition, they were also involved in ensuring that staff whom inspectors were going to speak with were prepared and supported. Debriefing sessions for these staff also featured, both to provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on the experience and as an attempt to gauge what key lines of enquiry the inspectors may be wishing to explore.

P6: *Ofsted went from being quite positive in the first week to being very, very negative as time went on. My experience of going through the Ofsted inspection itself wasn't horrific. I had some good honest conversations with inspectors and with people throughout that process about what they were going to find. And I didn't take the position of saying that things were going to be glowingly wonderful. I had been quite clear that I understood where there were gaps and deficits and what the plans were. And in fact, at some point…. , I've got an email from the then Chief exec saying the inspectors were really impressed with my clarity and my honesty, so I came out of that inspection thinking I had sold myself quite well.*

P3 expressed similar views, albeit with slightly more nuanced language. She was unique insofar as at the time of the interview she had been through two inspections within the same local authority.

P3: *My first experience of the inspection was… an extremely professional, extremely experienced lead inspector and a reasonable team. They weren't entirely reasonable but after what I then experienced, they were. She was thorough, her points were evidence-based, she'd have reasonable conversations and debates about things. She'd understand*

your point of view, even if she didn't agree with it. She was a very experienced AD before becoming an inspector and for me, that is a key issue in this inspection regime.

So, we had a reasonable three weeks. It was exhausting. It was a 16/17 hour day. I don't think they have a clue what goes on behind the scenes. I think they think we all go home at six o'clock at night….. Small team in a small authority. No acknowledgement in a small authority you have one IT person, one data analyst,... Yes, we know you're small….'there, there, there'…' pat, pat, pat' kind of approach.

P7 described a poor, chaotic start:

P7: *With the benefit of hindsight, it was clear from day one when the inspectors arrived on site that things would not end well. I arrived at 7.30am expecting a hive of activity in preparation for their arrival to find that it was only the performance manager and myself in. My manager and two senior colleagues turned up about 9.30am which was after the lead inspector arrived. SMT were scheduled to meet with the inspectors at 10am, which was delayed [redacted incident] and it was clear that they were not amused with this. They asked for our self-assessment – which hadn't been prepared. They were extremely professional and pleasant, but it was clear to me that our preparation was extremely lacking and that there was no hiding this. We never really recovered.*

In terms of P4, she was much more neutral in her description of her experience of the inspection. She described meeting with two inspectors:

P4: *They were pleasant. They asked questions and listened to my answers. They didn't seem to have any specific areas that they focused on more than others, but the interviews have blurred a bit …. I didn't feel as though I was being challenged. Even though I have some worries about parts of my service they didn't appear to focus on those.*

P1 has less to say about the actual inspection, which may reflect his experience of being somewhat detached from it:

P1: *I felt really peripheral, I never met the inspectors until the third week which was my appointment. I was in the daily meetings, but they didn't really speak to me, I was the note taker. So, you're in this curious position of it's all going to be on your head, but you're actually bugger all to do with it, you are the messenger boy, and the grown-ups are having the conversation. It did really feel like that.*

This scenario seemed at odds with comments P1 made earlier in his story where he says:

P1: *You spend the next three years waiting for this bloody inspection. There were these days set aside and you're waiting for the call on the Monday, you know, and you think were you relieved not to get the call or think, oh Christ, not another three weeks of hanging on. And it sort of hangs over you like, yeah, cloud cover the whole time.*

There had been no prior discussion as to what roles would be adopted by whom during the actual inspection. It was clear that P1 struggled with this. It is not inconceivable that the DCS taking direct responsibility for the mechanics of the

inspection may have seemed a way of limiting control to ensure that a consistent message was being delivered. There was also a risk that this could be perceived as a lack of confidence in the competence of the most senior manager with responsibility for children's social care operations.

Managing the inspection was also an issue for P2:

P2: *They came in. I think we didn't handle the inspection as well as I would have liked and nor did the lead inspector. The lead inspector didn't do KITs (keeping in touch meetings) with us…… I would not do the inspection in the same way now…. I would be expecting far more engagement through the process*.

Whether or not senior leaders can influence inspectors or outcomes is more likely to be rooted in fantasy rather than reality, although a consistent, confident message may present a picture of organisations that know themselves well. It was important to P2, which he articulated when talking about the pre-inspection assessment and improvement plan earlier in his narrative in saying that he could demonstrate ownership of the shortcomings together with a clear plan to address them.

During her narrative, P5 made a simple comment:

P5: *The lead inspector I would never wish to meet again, especially on a dark night. They were horrendous, I have to say. However, we were inadequate, it was inadequate.*

Despite all the participants stating that they had identified and attempted to articulate vulnerabilities prior to the inspection, it was apparent from the narratives that they had hoped to have put in sufficient mitigations to, at the very least, divert a finding of inadequate. As such, each participant said that they entered into the inspection hopeful that their endeavours had been sufficient to influence a more positive outcome, whether as a 'whole' system outcome for those participants with a responsibility for the whole system or a 'focused' positive outcome in their particular service area for those leaders responsible for a specific service area.[14]

Apart from in one narrative, there did not appear to be a single incident that may have swayed the inspectors from their emerging views. However, it was the view of this participant that a single (significant) incident contributed to the inadequate judgement.

Describing the event, P3 said:

P3: *We had lots of discussions about this issue around (redacted) and I think my inexperience came through, so I was very upfront about it, I was very clear about it, was very honest about it, very transparent about it….I genuinely believe she was trying to be helpful. Week three focused on that area rather than everything else and at this point we were scraping an RI and she was quite clear about that. She was saying, you know, you're over the line.*

[14] The Ofsted inspection programme has, over the years, and perhaps more significantly since the enquiry into the death of Baby Peter, shifted focus from data-driven lines of enquiry to include a methodology of discussion, exploration and observation. Whilst Ofsted still seeks a range of quantitative and demographic data, the local authority's own self-assessment of their strengths and areas for development is a significant component of key lines of further enquiry for inspectors, alongside audit and file review activities.

Whilst they were digging around in this area, which I knew was going to be, what I call, a smelly fish, one of the inspectors was sitting next to a team manager, … when she was sitting there he answered the phone, for which I will never forgive him (laughs), – because that was a call to say that (redacted as serious incident could identify the participant) – we lost our RI. It went literally then and there, and rightly so, you've got a serious incident like that…… The political fallout, as you can imagine, was huge, but they didn't get rid of the DCS and they didn't get rid of me…., I was very lucky the lead inspector was very gracious in the report specifically about me.

P2, P4 and P7 described their experiences in similar terms:

P4: *At the end of week three we were in a feedback meeting as a management team. We were told they said something like they are not going to inspect any further and that they are going to do a piece of work with us about permanence. I remember looking at (colleagues) and saying, 'this is not good'…. 'this is them telling us we are inadequate'.*

And…

P7: *By the middle of week three we knew our fate. The mood had changed…..We met with the lead and deputy lead inspectors on the Wednesday when they effectively said that not only was the quality of the work poor, but we also had no idea that it was poor and no plans to address this.*

In describing his experience, P1 described, in part, similarities to P3's experience, albeit that there was not a significant single incident. Of note is his previous description of feeling that was excluded when the inspectors first arrived:

P1: *She (the DCS) went on this holiday in the second week…., but she left not really speaking to me properly and she got this improvement person who I got along very well with…. she shared stuff with this improvement person, but she hadn't shared with me and it was at that point I got annoyed and angry and I remember saying to the commissioning person who was helping with sorting the inspection, 'you all know whose bloody neck's on the line here', and she said yeah. I got on very well with her but that was the only time I ever really shared … what we all knew to be a potential outcome. But at that point it felt like we were still heading for RI. It all unravelled very quickly in the third week when they started interviewing social workers; it just went to pot where it unravelled very fast. We knew where it was going by the end of week three, it was all done and dusted really, and they more or less told us.*

4.7 Theme 4: Responsibility, Accountability and Blame

The issue of responsibility and accountability permeated throughout much of the narratives, with participants returning to this theme at various points in their stories. All were confident in their work roles, expressed their competence with the complexities and demands placed upon them and were acutely aware of the implications for their authority should Ofsted find them wanting. All of the participants had direct experience of inspections, although not all in leadership roles.

It was apparent, however, that apart from two participants (P1 & P2), little exploration of what a poor outcome may mean for them both professionally and personally had been considered. In part, there was a direct correlation of this theme with the first theme of preparedness; all, except P4, had raised issues prior to the inspection, which had called into question whether the authority would receive a favourable judgement.

The notion of professional responsibility and accountability was presented by participants as a realisation that heads must roll and blame be attributed. Although local authorities are given a provisional judgement at the end of the fieldwork, the inspection process allows a period for factual inaccuracies to be challenged and corrected together with an internal moderation undertaken by Ofsted, before the formal judgement is announced via publication of the inspection report. Until this date it is expected that the outcome will be embargoed from local announcements, including all but a few selected members of staff. This not insignificant period of seven weeks was summed up by P1:

P1: *Then Ofsted had buggered off and you're left in this strange interregnum… you're not allowed to say anything……, and of course the heads of service got to know. Well then everybody knows……but nobody is allowed to say anything, so it's just a ridiculous situation.*

Other participants described this period as business as usual insofar as they continued with their normal responsibilities without any clear indication of what may or may not happen.

For P1, however, his fate was sealed almost immediately after the inspectors had left. In a conversation with his manager at the time, Ofsted made it clear during the third week that they had enough evidence to conclude that the authority was inadequate, as P1 recounts:

P1: *At that point I said, well, I think we both know I'm going to have to go and she said yeah. She took that as me resigning, which I didn't think I'd done, but I suppose I think that was probably not an unreasonable interpretation of what I said, but at that stage I was pretty much…… . I was pretty distressed, really, but we were still having to put a front on for the people who were reporting to me.*

He went on to say that within a few days of this conversation he was called to a meeting with HR where it was put to him that he had 'resigned'. It was stated that Ofsted had found practice to be really poor, which he acknowledged before adding that it wasn't all down to him. Summoned to another meeting with HR the following week, P1 stated:

P1: *....at this next meeting the Chief Executive's there. It's perfectly obvious what she thinks I've said is that I'm going to dish the dirt on (redacted). So, she's there with her notebook in her hand waiting for me to dish the dirt and I don't do that.*

A little later he said:

P1: *My clear expectation was that if I had not taken what they were offering, which was a poor package, it was going to be come down, clear your desk and we will escort you*

out of the building. It was what I expected that morning. It was clear that they needed a scapegoat, and I was going to be it.

Despite being clear that he was going to be held accountable for the outcome and was leaving, P1 was, in fact, asked to stay on in his role until a suitable replacement could be found, which covered the whole period that the outcome was embargoed. However, that was not without issue:

P1: *She [DCS] wasn't allowed to speak to me during those seven weeks, it was a bizarre thing. I would have to phone her on her personal mobile, and we'd agree to meet in some part of [the building] where nobody went to talk about what was going on.*

Similarly to P1, P5 left her role as a direct result of the inspection outcome, although her fate wasn't communicated to her until after the report and outcome had been formally published. Outlining the events leading up to her leaving, P5 said:

P5: *The chief exec was in a very bad mood and the guy that he brought back in, he had his ear and I got the blame and was asked to leave…., to compound my misery or humiliation, I think the day after the announcement the Chief Executive got all the staff in the town hall, everybody that worked for me in that room and stood at the front with this guy; I was made to sit in the audience…… and there is the guy stood next to him, just listening to this other guy who had done my job, hadn't put a plan together, had clearly not told him how bad it was and the next day or a couple of days later, the interim DCS calls me into a room, HR were there and said you need to go. I had been in post six months.*

P6 and P7 remained in post for a period following the publication of their respective inspection reports and both talked about being part of the improvement journey. It was interesting that in both cases the decision that they would leave was taken by a newly appointed DCS who had no prior knowledge of them. P6 described how, following the appointment of a new DCS and AD, almost two years post inspection, she was challenged about poor performance and her leadership style, despite positive feedback about her service from the Ofsted inspectors monitoring visits:

P6: *I think what really irritated me in the end was the fact that all the way through improvement work, right up until we got the new team come in and even when they first joined the feedback, the feedback about the work I was doing was positive.*
And then they had their own people that they wanted to bring in…. so, their way of asking me to move on was to essentially say to me that they were concerned about my leadership style because there were some performance data that hadn't improved and then the data they used wasn't data even for us. And so, I argued the point about the data but they held their position that they were going to take me into a capability framework because this data was poor and that was about my leadership style.

Rather than enter into long, protracted discussion, P6 negotiated a redundancy package.

P7 said:

P7: *It was eight months after the inspection. By this time all the senior management team, except one other and myself, had gone. A new DCS joined the organisation in December*

with a new assistant director also introduced, but she did not start full time until the January. We had just had out first monitoring visit, which wasn't a disaster, but improvement has been limited. I remember being on leave for the day…..I had received a call from my office saying that HR were trying to get hold of me. By the time I got back to my own home there was an email from HR saying that they were dispensing with my services. I had been dismissed by email. There had been no discussion. I had even seen the DCS a few days before when he told me that my portfolio was far too big and that they were going to split my job into two posts with him asking me which role I would like. My first reaction was shock, then disbelief….. I felt blamed and I was humiliated.

P2 and P3 had different experiences. Both remained in post after the inadequate inspection, with P2 (at the point of interview) having been reinspected with a positive outcome and P3 (when interviewed) having moved on to a new role after a reinspection.

However, P2 felt that the inspection report was not explicit in the action he had taken to remedy shortcomings that he had identified, leaving him open to blame. P2 said:

P2: *The one thing that I found really difficult through the whole of the report writing process was that in all of the versions of the report that was shared with me they said that I'd taken decisive action, apart from in the published report,… that element was removed and that was a really unhelpful thing. It would have been much more helpful from my perspective if I been seen as part of the solution and I really wasn't.*

There were other similarities in their narratives, insomuch as both had support from their chief executives and elected members and that they had not been placed under

any direct pressure to resign, nor were there plans to replace them. P2 stated that he had made it clear that he was not prepared to fall on his sword and that he saw his role as leading the authority to a positive outcome at the reinspection. Whilst both were supported from within their own organisation, each faced challenges that called into question their competencies as senior leaders and, more importantly, whether they could bring about the necessary improvements.[15]

When local authority children's social care authorities fail an inspection, they are subject to two parallel processes. Firstly, they are subject to an assessment by the Department of Education as to whether they are a 'fit and proper' organisation to deliver statutory children's social care services. This assessment is undertaken by government-appointed commissioners who report directly to the Secretary of State for Education. This report is published on the DfE website.

Secondly, councils undertake a series of monitoring visits by Ofsted inspectors. These visits are designed to assist local authorities with a diagnostic assessment of how individual aspects of service delivery are improving. The outcome of monitoring visits, except for the first one, is published in letter form on the Ofsted website.

[15] When local authority children's social care authorities fail an inspection, they are subject to two parallel processes. Firstly, they are subject to an assessment by the Department of Education as to whether they are a 'fit and proper' organisation to deliver statutory children's social care services. This assessment is undertaken by government-appointed commissioners who report directly to the Secretary of State for Education. This report is published on the DfE website.

Both P2 and P3 described incidents that were of concern to them relating to either the role of the commissioner or the monitoring process, which they perceived were both publicly apportioning blame for the initial failures that led to the inadequate inspection outcome and questioning their ability to bring about the necessary changes required.

P2 found the role of the commissioner unhelpful and felt that she had a predetermined agenda that she would not deviate from despite being presented with a clear message that he was staying.

P2: *We had the whole commissioner piece where a certain managerial style was used by quite a hostile commissioner, which certainly undermined all my confidence. We had an improvement partner led by a very experienced DCS. At no point did he ever say [redacted] isn't the right person, and so my boss, even though he was told I should go, the leader, …. they all said no [redacted] is staying and so there was a general support for me, and over time the commissioner became less and less credible.*

P3 described the period following the inspection with both the DfE-appointed commissioner and the Ofsted monitoring process as an 'interesting experience'. She said:

P3: *We had a DFE advisor who was horrendous. He is somebody that had been got rid of by Ofsted previously and the DFE had employed him. He was outdated, he was sexist, he was… you name it. It was really challenging. He frequently commented that he was surprised that I had remained in post.*

And in relation to the Ofsted monitoring visits she said:

P3: *Monitoring visits were horrendous, and we started with a new lead inspector, and this is where my issue with Ofsted comes in. The lead inspector's behaviour was abhorrent. We had situations whereby she'd be sitting in an office with a glass screen physically being aggressive in her communication using her arms, leaning across the table at social workers. They were coming out in tears. She'd then deny that she had done that, and we'd say but you're sitting in office in a glass room, everybody could see it and hear it. You challenge that and then you're accused of being defensive, obstructive and unwilling to face the reality of the situation.*

P3 described how a formal complaint was made to Ofsted and alternative inspectors were provided for future monitoring visits, although Ofsted did not acknowledge that this was due to a complaint being made, merely stating that not all monitoring visits were undertaken by the same inspectors. However, later in the interview, P3 described the follow-up inspection, which was two years later, saying:

P3: *We got the call 17 days after our last monitoring visit and the lead inspector was the one that we had complained about…… We had huge discussions bordering on arguments, not because I was being argumentative – I was being assertive – but because this inspector couldn't control her behaviour……. We got RI across the board, but we deserved good for leadership. There is no doubt about that. We were there and it was personal.*

It is, of course, difficult to know whether any conscious or unconscious bias has any basis in fact, but it was clearly an issue for P3 throughout the period from the initial inspection to the follow-up inspection.

Of all the participants, P4's journey from the inadequate Ofsted inspection was different insofar as she decided prior to the reinspection to move on. P4 was clear that this was her decision, rather than a response to external pressure. However, I was left wondering whether this was to avoid blame should the next inspection not be positive. P4 had directly experienced the outcome of an inadequate inspection, with colleagues being held accountable and being 'moved on'. P4 described her decision as:

P4: *[w]here I was at in my personal life, and some of that was I almost felt like I loved the job too much and was beholden to it, and it wasn't a safe space to be professional anymore because if you'd asked me to jump, I would have said 'how high' and I was losing a sense of who I was as a professional.*

4.8 Theme 5: Experiences of Anger and Trust

Anger and trust were a thread through all of the interviews. Interestingly, some participants, in addition to describing being recipients of the organisation's anger and the lack of trust in them, also described how they felt angry and lacked trust in the organisation treating them with the level of professional courtesy that they felt they were entitled to.

The actual words ‘anger’, ‘angry’ or ‘trust’ were not specifically used in the majority of narratives; it was the description of events – often more than once in each narrative and at different times in the participants’ journey – together with my observations of how these were described that led to this theme being developed.

For some, the issues of anger and trust were more apparent in the period leading up to the actual inspection. They had identified issues of concern, which they had presented only for these to be minimised or dismissed.

P2 described his anger::

P2: *That was the thing with being a new DCS, the previous DCS being the person who was my boss… but I didn't manage anybody, and it was very interesting after some changes that I then suddenly found that everybody had been asked or told to lie to me. There was this model, which created this deeply unhelpful set of relationships that meant that there wasn't openness, transparency and trust.*

This pre-inspection was also an issue for P5. She had consistently raised issues with her (then) DCS, who actually left before the inspection itself and with the chief executive:

P5: *I put a PowerPoint together, which basically fell on our sword saying we know it’s crap but we’re going to fix it…. I’m going to fix it.*

Prior to the inspectors landing, a new DCS was brought in: this was the previous interim assistant director, with P5 saying:

P5: *He changed my PowerPoint; the chief exec was most reluctant to be honest with Ofsted. I think he thought we could try and navigate it and fudge our way through, and of course Ofsted found us wanting, as they would, and I was between a rock and a hard place between not having permission to say we know it's terrible and I think we should have been much more robust.*

Later in the narrative, P5, when talking about trust, stated:

P5: *I also think the chief executive was between a rock and a hard place. He had brought this guy back as the interim DCS who had previously held my role on an interim basis but who had not raised any issues about how bad the service was. I think the chief executive was not sure who to trust but they had obviously bonded, and I think that gender was an issue, and he was clearly putting more faith in what he was hearing from the interim DCS.*

Later she said:

P5: *It seems quite astounding to me that you've got somebody who was doing your job even on the basis of an interim appointment, who was reporting to clearly an ineffective DCS, ... it just doesn't compute for me how you would then bring back the person who was in your post into a more senior role and not hold them to account for some of the stuff that happened before.*

Overall, anger and distrust were more evident post inspection – particularly, but not exclusively, with leaders that had lost their jobs. P5, who was one of the participants who was dismissed as a result of the inspection, poignantly recalled:

P5: *I look back and think what did I do wrong? Why would you have picked on me? I'd love to see the Chief Executive… he never came anywhere near me. I could tell that something was going to happen….. there were whisperings and I just thought….. I said to my husband, they're going to blame me for this, they're going to ask me to go, and it's like football management, isn't it?*

A little later she said:

P5: *And then of course they all looked astonished when they were told how bad it was. Also, this bloke who I replaced kept coming and shaking his head, going oh it's terrible. Ofsted have said this, Ofsted have said that and I'm thinking you should know that, why don't you know that…. anyhow, I was very angry and I was humiliated, really humiliated.*

In his description P7 said:

P7: *Thinking now, I look back and initially I was shocked. There had been no indication that I was going to be dismissed and I had been part of the discussions about the improvement journey and my role in it. I quite quickly became angry due to the treatment I received. I felt that the HR negotiator was taking great pleasure in making my leaving as uncomfortable as possible. It had been agreed that I would be allowed to explain to staff that I was leaving using my own narrative in an agreed email to staff. However, two*

days before my leaving day, and despite me writing what I wanted to say, nothing had been sent so I sent it myself. I was then called before the director of HR who threatened me with withdrawal of the financial settlement agreement as I had effectively written to staff to say that I was resigning. I was furious. All that I thought I had been promised, namely to leave with a degree of dignity, was being denied to me.

The journey for P6's departure from her organisation is highlighted in 4.5.1. She describes her irritation and anger in particular at being blamed for poor performance, pointing out that many of the performance areas that were considered to be of concern she did not have responsibility for. She described trying to stand up to the proposed action but concluded:

P6: *I just didn't trust them. They clearly had decided that I was going, and I didn't think I would be able to turn that around, so I asked for redundancy.*

P4 talked of her experiences post inspection. She spoke of how the DCS, who had joined the organisation just prior to inspection, sought to distance herself from having any knowledge of the areas of poor practice identified despite having being told many times. She also talked about the interim director – her immediate line manager – who had also been appointed following the poor inspection outcome.

P4: *He was a whirlwind. He was a bit of a bomb; I want to say a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but it was much bigger than that. I think he's very bright and had a strong sense of what good looks like…but no people skills whatsoever. He would pussyfoot around the*

truth, and he'd say quite bullying things without saying I don't think this is very good. It was difficult to know what he was thinking and for me that didn't feel comfortable.

P1, in his narrative, talked about feeling angry that he felt marginalised and excluded during the initial part of the inspection, and more so when the DCS went on leave part way through and he was left holding the fort yet with little information being passed to him, leading to feelings of vulnerability (described in 4.4.2). However, he went on to say that he was determined that he was not going to be angry or bitter. I was struck by a comment made when talking about his leaving, which may be viewed as sadness and disappointment rather than anger. However, the tone suggested otherwise:

P1: *The other thing I was going to say about the leaving do….my peer group across the council disappeared. All had different reasons for not coming, some of them maybe good, but none came. Suddenly you realise that maybe this is how it's going to be. It's going to be quite difficult….some of those were not my personal friends, but we had been colleagues for a long time.*

Even after P1 left the employment of the council he faced barriers to his future role. He described an incident where he expressed an interest in being on the board of trustees of an organisation but was turned down.

P1: *It probably didn't do me any favours because I got angry. So, I wrote back to the recruiter, and I said I haven't been accused of anything, I wasn't sacked, there was no disciplinary processes against me, never have been. Getting angry about it, on one level, made me think Christ I can't even give my time away. It really was anxiety provoking.*

I'm not this horrible failure and I need to get over this shame, I need to get over this defensiveness.

Both P2 and P3 described the period post inspection and their experience of DfE commissioners and Ofsted inspectors. P2 described his thoughts when being challenged as angrily thinking 'I'll show you'.

P3's account of the period between the first inspection outcome and the conclusion highlighted periods of dissatisfaction, anger and a lack of trust, particularly when it was discovered that the lead inspector for the reinspection was someone against whom a formal complaint had been made. She said:

P3: *It was hard not to get angry. We were fighting for good in leadership. We had lots of evidence to do that. She (inspector) absolutely wouldn't give us that because I argued with her; because I had pushed back; because we would have these kinds of case discussions and it felt personal, and it felt like it was because I'd put in a complaint about her and that it was about her discrediting me.*

4.9 Theme 6: Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation

Professional loneliness and isolation were a common feature in some narratives. Loneliness and isolation presented in many ways, some of which have already been described in other themes, ranging from P1's narrative that his DCS had been told not to have contact with him prior to him and how they would meet in a secret place to P5's

account of being ostracised and made to sit within the audience when her Chief Executive was briefing staff on the inspection outcome.

However, the feelings of loneliness and isolation ran much deeper within the stories with participants recounting their own experiences. What was interesting from the themes was that the degree of loneliness and isolation changed for some participants over time whilst others struggled for much longer. In addition, the degree to which participants felt professional loneliness and isolation appeared more acute within the tier 1 and 2 cohort.

P1's graphic description highlights this vividly:

P1: *So you realise you're kind of poison pretty quickly……It's not a good career move to be seen close to you. And more of that took place, so when I left, I suppose I've always been a bit of a loner and I probably don't have a lot of friends in the business, but I knew a lot of people; I know a lot of people, and not that many came forward. A few of them got in contact. Not that many. I reached out to a few….. I'll give people one email and if they don't respond I'll just say okay. I've got the message which probably wasn't that fair, but it was the only way I could deal with it and because I'm probably a bit of a proud person I didn't reach out as much as I should have done.*

It was interesting that P1 sought to accept responsibility for this.

P3, who was employed at the same level as P1, remained in post. She was an inexperienced tier 2 manager who was trying to make sense of the improvement journey,

support her staff and deliver the outcomes expected of her. At that time the number of inadequate authorities was much more limited and arrangements for support less well developed, as P3 described:

P3: *The LGA*[16] *was the most helpful person at the time, so we worked with our regional LGA representative. There wasn't anybody else in the region that was inadequate so you're like the pariah. Support is not particularly forthcoming. It was so lonely. Nobody really wants to help. Everybody's got their head in the bucket. They all want to suck information out of you in terms of what it was like; what they can learn from you; everybody wants a presentation; everybody wants to know what it is that they can avoid, but nobody wants to come and say are you okay? And it was really lonely, without a doubt, and you question your trust in other colleagues.*

P2's narrative echoed similar sentiments to those of P3. As an experienced DCS he had an established network of peers that he had frequent contact with, albeit through the professional Association of Directors of Social Care (ADCS) network. This has included attendance at ADCS conferences and events, together with communication from the organisation and access to policy documents and research. In the interview, he said:

P2: *This whole thing about you becoming a sort of a persona non grata became quite apparent to me whereas you then suddenly become a star when the situation is then different and that's quite an interesting place to be; an interesting sort of scenario, and I've done quite a lot of work with ADCS talking about how they respond to authorities*

[16] The Local Government Association (LGA). The LGA is the national membership body for local authorities and works on behalf of its member councils to support, promote and improve local government.

that are inadequate and how they respond as leaders within the organisation. When you're a DCS in an inadequate authority you're not a leper; it's not catching but it felt like that at the time and I think the interesting thing for me is how personalised it became, it's a job – so why is it that it becomes actually quite personal and some of that is that you feel that you have been personally attacked? I wonder whether it's to do with the guidance which says, you know, you are ultimately professionally accountable but why does that make you personally accountable? And I found that quite interesting in its own right and it's probably easier to reflect on that now rather than, you know, looking at it then.

He later added:

P2: *I will always remember the ALDCS*[17] *meeting when I had to announce that we were inadequate, there was quite a lot of shock in the room because I was seen as being a good DCS. There was no discussion about it, we just moved on and the DCS next to me said 'why don't people want to talk about this?' And I felt very lonely at that point.*

It should, of course, be remembered that there are 152 local authorities in England with responsibility for children's social care and subject to the Ofsted inspection frameworks. As such, tier 1 and tier 2 officers are, by comparison to the overall statutory children's services workforce, a relatively small cohort. Tier 1 officers are automatically members of the ADCS with associate membership available to tier 2 or tier 3 officers. In London there is also a group for tier 2 officers facilitated by the LGA. These associations and forums together with an informal network of professional connections may account

[17] Association of London Children's Services Directors

for professional isolation and loneliness, in terms of feeling estranged from peers, which is more acute for tier 1 and tier 2 officers. However, loneliness does also manifest itself for more junior staff through their lived experiences.

P7's amplifies this point:

P7: *I had a conversation with HR, which wasn't really a conversation, they just told me they no longer wanted my services. They suggested that I didn't need to come into the office anymore and that I could 'take gardening leave' until the settlement agreement had been resolved. I didn't want to do that; it seemed too much like I was being suspended and I felt that I hadn't done anything wrong. I had been told that I couldn't talk to anyone about my leaving …. so I saw people and passed them in the corridor, and I was convinced that they knew I was leaving but they didn't say anything. My managers avoided me, and I wasn't invited to meetings. In fact, I didn't have anything to do… I just turned up, sat around for eight hours and went home. I was in the office for about three weeks before a final date for me leaving was agreed. In my head I wanted my leaving to be under my control; I wanted to say goodbye to people that I had worked with for a very long time. I had hoped that I would be allowed to say that I was leaving and moving on; the service I managed needed a fresh start etc. rather than I was being dismissed. The reality was, however, much as I didn't want it to be true, I was being dismissed. With the benefit of hindsight, I shouldn't have gone back. It was hard, and it was very hurtful. I've never felt more on my own.*

4.10 Theme 7: The Impact on Emotional Well-being

At the time of the interviews there had been a gap of at least a year from an inadequate inspection outcome for all the participants. Two of the participants had remained in post to the point where their authority was reinspected. Of these two, one has continued in the same post so far, the other having moved to a new role elsewhere. Four of the seven participants left their role as a direct result of the inspection outcome, and the final participant resigned from her role some months after the inspection, but it was clear from her narrative that the work required as part of the improvement journey was a significant factor in her decision. It is noteworthy that the two officers that remained in post were at tier 1 and tier 2 level of seniority. The remaining two tier 2 officers left their roles almost immediately at the point that the inspection report was published.

As already outlined elsewhere, there is a period from the end of the inspection fieldwork to the formal publication of the report and judgement, although on the final day of the inspection fieldwork the lead inspector provides an overview of the findings together with the provisional judgement. This interregnum is an important part of the process as it allows the report to be written, factual amendments to be considered and a quality assurance process. However, this was a significant period for some participants, especially as they were sworn to secrecy. P1 stated (as described on p. 14) that he was distressed as it was clear that he would need to leave but needed to put on a front and invent a cover story. Specifically, P1 said:

P1: *But those few weeks were shattering, it was difficult….I accessed the staff support and asked for some counselling sessions and started with those because I was absolutely distraught.*

For others, during this period their fate hadn't been determined, but nevertheless it was clear that the outcome was significant in terms of their emotional well-being. P2 said:

P2: *And they come in and they say it's going to be a negative outcome……., and what I felt was quite humiliated, quite depressed.*

P2 talked about the support he received internally, but it is clear from the comment that the enormity of a failed inspection, professionally, played heavily on his mind.

This interregnum period, in terms of a description of emotional well-being for the other participants, did not feature in their narratives. However, all the participants commented, some in more nuanced terms, on the impact on their emotional well-being post the publication of the report.

Like P2, P3 remained in post following the inspection with a high degree of member and chief officer support. At the time of interview, both had been subject to a reinspection, which resulted in an improvement in outcome. As tier 1 and 2 leaders, P2 and P3 talked about the overwhelming sense of responsibility for the recovery. They described a sense of feeling isolated and questioning whom they could trust; they described the emotional toll and personal sacrifices they made; they were conscious of

their professional reputations and were clear about the impact on them, professionally, if they failed to deliver.

P3 summarised this by saying:

P3: *It was horrific. I came as close as I've ever been in my life to having a mental breakdown.*

For P3, the outcome of the reinspection, whilst no longer judged as inadequate, was not what she felt they deserved, particularly in the area of leadership. As a result, she decided that she should move on. Talking about that decision she said:

P3: *I was also of the view that mental health wise I wasn't in a great place following that inspection and that I was finding it very difficult to have positive conversations with my team about that inspection and I felt that that wasn't good leadership. I didn't care. I was quite prepared to go and be a team manager if that is what I needed, but at the time emotionally and mentally….I don't care. I was prepared to throw a 25-year career away just because of the mental and emotional exhaustion.*

P2 talked in similar terms as he described his experience of the improvement journey:

P2: *This becomes all you can think about, and it begins to impact on your physical health. I can look back at it now and say it was horrendous. I remember one day coming home and I felt really ill. And I thought I'm just going to check my blood pressure and it was 234 over 140 and I thought, you know, this just has to stop.*

Professional survival, according to P2, comes at a cost:

P2: *I've got to comply. I don't usually apologise for things that I don't feel responsible for, but that was the only way to survive this and therefore to survive with my professional credibility and integrity intact was to play the game. I did survive, but I got close to being broken by the game.*

P1, P5, P6 and P7 were dismissed as a result of the inadequate inspection outcome, although for two this was not an immediate response, occurring at a later stage following a change of more senior leadership. In telling their stories there was a genuine sense of sadness in the delivery; defensiveness and self-pity were not evident. There were, unsurprisingly, moments of anger, disquiet and disbelief in the narratives but also a high degree of acceptance in terms of an acknowledgement of personal responsibility even when this seemed displaced.

In describing his journey, which was two and a half years on from the inspection, P1 talked about how he couldn't face another job at the same level, even if he had been able to secure one, together with an ongoing sense of shame.

P1: *I think if I had got a job at the time, it would have been a disaster, and I would have been completely emotionally unprepared and unable to do it. There are those people who get on because they don't think it's about them whereas I did, and to a certain extent still do feel it was about me. I'm not carrying some horrible burden, although I carry this sense of shame around with me like a bag all the time.*

P7's description had similarities, although perhaps the realisation of being emotionally unprepared took longer to appear. He explained that he decided he was going to apply for positions at an equivalent level of seniority to his previous post rather than re-enter the job market at a lower grade, saying:

P7: *My initial shock was quickly replaced with anger, but I was determined that I would show them. I applied for similar-level posts and recall vividly a conversation with a recruitment consultant when I wasn't shortlisted for an identical post to that I had been in where the feedback was that they weren't prepared to take a chance with me. I applied for other posts where I was shortlisted but was not successful. Each interview rejection just knocked my confidence and I got to the point where I felt that I needed to stop putting myself in positions of being rejected. Each rejection impacted on my mental health.*

Later he said:

P7: *Have I moved on? I had been a manager for 22 years, 16 years at a senior level. I had led teams and services through positive inspections but without any discussion, any opportunity to be heard, I was cast aside as a failure. It hurts; you are humiliated; you avoid situations where you might bump into ex-colleagues; you fantasise that you are being spoken about in a negative way; you lose confidence. Of course, I have moved on but there is still a bitter taste and I think the impact never goes away.*

P5 and P6 talked in almost identical terms. Both are currently in locum roles and neither, at the time of interview, had any interest in returning to permanent appointments at their previous level of seniority, due in part to the need to protect themselves.

In her story, P5 said pointedly:

P5: *I did go through a period of….. I was angry, humiliated, devastated, but at the end of the day you've got to move on, haven't you? And they chose to behave in that way. It was less about me than about them protecting themselves and promoting themselves, wasn't it? It's incredibly unjust. I think do I want to put myself through that again because the atmosphere that descends, that blame you, it hovers over you. It's like a cloud. I have recovered to some extent, but it never goes away. I just sense my reputation being damaged consequently and there was no duty of care at all. No offer of welfare support and it's shocking really.*

P6 also talked about how shock led to anger and feelings of humiliation. She talked about how the reasons for her needing to leave shifted in a short period of time to the point that despite her challenge, her manager gave up even trying to defend his position. She talked about a need to secure new employment after a short period of not working, saying:

P6: *I've got to seriously think about it but that in itself made me feel hugely anxious and worried and stressed because it was like I'm not qualified to do anything else, and I don't want to do what I'm qualified to do.*

Describing how she felt during the period immediately following her exit from her role, she stated:

P6: *It took about two months to decompress and that's the word I use when I think about it in my head. It was like I had been deep down in the bottom of the ocean and had come up too quickly and had the bends and I needed that time to recover.*

P6 has now been working for 18 months in a new role, which is less senior. Talking about her future plans she said:

P6: *I still cannot ever think about doing a job more senior than this one because I don't want to deal with that level of pressure, that becomes my whole life again. I had neglected my daughter and my husband and l still carry a lot of guilt about that.*

P4 was the only participant that left her role following an inadequate inspection and prior to a reinspection voluntarily. She described circumstances in which she felt unsupported and discussed feeling anxious about how difficult she was finding the onerous demands on her time and trying to bring about the changes required. She had a wide portfolio with significant day-to-day operational responsibility for a diverse range of service provision. She had directly experienced other staff being moved on and was under no illusion what another inadequate judgement would mean for her personally. She talked of feeling like she was working in a silo:

P4: *There was a sense of fear that went through the whole team with everybody being constantly frightened for their jobs. Everyone and everything were treated with suspicion.*

Talking later about her decision to leave, she said:

P4: *I think if I had stayed another six months, I would probably have been kicked hard enough for me not to get up very easily and I was determined that this wouldn't happen.*

She described feeling that no one was interested in her success and that she had a mountain to climb to prove that she was worthy of her job. Feeling that she was not always at her best under pressure led to concerns about what her focus was becoming. P4 was much more nuanced in her description of her emotional well-being; however, the following comment about her decision to leave was of note:

P4: *I almost felt as though I loved the job too much and I was beholden to it and it wasn't a safe space to be a professional anymore because if you asked me to jump, I would have said how high. I'm grateful to myself that I did that as I don't want to be in that position again. Some of the decision to leave was personal but at the same time part of me thought it was time to walk away and see what kind of professional I am.*

4.11 Theme 8: How Participants View their Future

At the time of the interviews only one of the participants remained in the same role that they had occupied at the time of the inadequate inspection. Of the remaining six, two had moved on to new roles by choice, and the remaining four participants had had their roles terminated.

Of these six, four participants felt that they should have remained in post, that they should have been allowed to be part of the improvement journey and contribute to a more positive inspection outcome. This was most apparent for P6 and P7, who lost their

roles at a later point post inspection and who both felt that the work they were doing was making a positive contribution to improvements in practice. These experiences had a direct impact on how P6 and P7 viewed their future careers within children's social care.

Based on his experience, in his narrative, P2, who is the most senior of all the participants, expresses a view about whether staff should be moved on:

P2: *And I think one of the things that's interesting when I talk to DCSs is now I keep on saying to them don't go for a big restructure. You've got to do as much as you can through (the improvement journey) ….don't go out for loads and loads of recruitment because you will get lots of letters saying you've not made sufficient progress.*

Later, in talking about his own position as the participant who remained in the same post, he stated:

P2: *I wanted to leave my job as Director of Children's Services as a success. I felt as if I would have had very unfinished business if I left after the inadequate, even though there were others who probably would have quite liked that.*

I was reminded that P2 is a tier 1 officer who by the nature of his role holds a powerful position and was much more central to decisions about which staff were retained once his own future was more secure. However, despite this apparent more privileged position, P2 was able to reflect on his own experience and what it may have meant if he had not had the support of his Chief Executive and lead member. P2 said:

P2: *I can't think of any DCSs where they've been in an inadequate authority at the point of inadequacy and then got another job as a DCS. I would have got another job but not as a DCS somewhere else, and I suppose the other thing is whether I'd want to do it again.*

Describing his thoughts about his own future, P2 shared that he had planned to move on following the successful reinspection, but prior to any further inspection, but his plans had been scuppered by the pandemic, and he had agreed to stay in his current role. Later he said:

P2: *You must wear your sack cloth and ashes and lie on your bed of nails and play the long game….and I think that's the issue for me. It's about how much of a game this is… Some people survive and do okay, some people don't, but I don't think any professional process should be able to do what this process does to any manager.*

Both P1 and P5 left their roles at the point of, or very shortly after, the publication of the inspection outcome report. Both talked about their journey since leaving and neither was currently working in a position at the same level of seniority, although both continued to work in children's social care in influential roles.

As already highlighted, P1 has found the emotional challenge of his journey challenging, which, it could be argued, feeds directly into his views about his future career at the level he had achieved prior to the inspection. Reflecting further he said:

P1: *Was I good at what I did? I think there were some things that I did well, although it's impossible to say this now that I have left it, although it was inadequate, and the inadequate inspection result has its own consequences. But when they inspected it was a lot better than it was when I arrived; it wasn't good enough, but it was a darn sight better than I found it and I had a role in that. But that's unsayable. Do I think I'm good enough to ever do it again? Probably not? Is this a harsh judgement on myself? I don't know. I don't know whether I'm being overly self-critical or not, and partly it's academic because I don't think anybody would offer me that sort of a job again.*

P5 talked in similar terms. She has since secured a new, less senior but still influential role on an interim basis and said:

P2: *I'm doing interim work now; I think maybe that's the last job I'll ever have as permanent. I wonder who would take me. I think my reputation is in tatters. Have I internalized that I'm a failure? What have I learned? I learned that it's a dangerous place to be. Would I want to be a DCS? No thank you. I don't know what I want to be when I grow up now. I'm quite happy for now.*

P6 and P7 remained in post for a significant period of time post the publication of the inspection report: 18 and eight months, respectively. Both stated that they moved on following the appointment of a permanent new statutory DCS and as a direct result of the decision being taken that they should no longer remain in their respective roles. Whilst the way they exited from their organisations was orchestrated differently, both were passive participants of decisions that they were unable to influence. P6 stated:

P6: *It was completely out of left field. It was a complete shock. That wasn't what I was expecting because all the other feedback up until then was positive.*

Talking about the period immediately after she left, P6 said:

P6: *I then took a couple of months off; I didn't want to do social work anymore. I'm not doing that again and I don't want to go back into children's social care. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was going to do anything if I didn't ever have to set foot in children's social care again because the whole two years of that improvement journey that I had been on took everything out of me. I had spent so much time and invested so much of my every waking hour in it – and to feel like they don't appreciate at all what you've done.*

Despite these comments, P6 has returned to a front-line children's social care leadership post, albeit at a lower level of seniority. She described opportunities for applying for more senior roles but had actively decided against this:

P6: *I still cannot ever think about doing a job more senior than this one currently because I don't want to deal with that level of stress. I've got my daughter, I've got my husband, I've got other things that are more important than work and I don't want work to be my whole life. I don't want to be the parent of a child who says, 'mummy just worked all the time; she was just so busy looking after other people's children that she didn't have time for me'.*

Thinking about her career to date, P6 talked about the inevitability that she would have faced an Ofsted inspection at some point as a tier 3 officer. She suggested that there

may have been opportunities to move to another authority prior to the inspection but felt that she was in between a rock and a hard place as she had not been in post long and to be applying for new roles so quickly may indicate that that she was not up to the task at that level. There was, she said, a hope that they would be able to pull enough out of the bag to secure a better outcome. Reflecting on what happened and in the context of future career choices, she said:

P6: *I think I am probably where I was always to some extent going to end up. I find it absolutely fascinating that as a profession whose job is to fundamentally help people and support people to get to a better place that we are so nasty and cruel to each other in these processes. And I think the higher up you get, the kind of nastier you have to be to your colleagues and to your staff. I don't think I want to be part of that anyway.*

P7's narrative was similar in tone and content. He expressed shock and anger at finding out that he was to leave his role. The journey to this position was, perhaps, slower than that of P6 and was also influenced by factors other than only his experience following the poor Ofsted outcome. Unlike P6, P7 was relatively confident, initially, that he would secure a role at the same level of seniority, although this has turned out not to be the case. He has, however, like P6, obtained a new leadership post within children's services, albeit at a lower grade, and is equally content in this role with no desire to advance further.

P4 left her role and has secured a new position. This was a voluntary move and she acknowledged that she was not asked to leave. However, she made two points:

P4: *I was involved in lots of discussions, I put things in writing and when I finally got something back, I felt that they were saying or trying to navigate something that wasn't said to my face and I thought 'what am I doing here?', 'what are you trying to do to me?'. I made up my mind that I needed to go.*

Acknowledging a comment that P4 made in her narrative that she has not actively sought out positions of a similar level or seniority or status, she went on to say:

P4: *I don't have to work 12-hour days anymore. I don't feel the same pressure. If I'm honest, I'm not really interested in having a job where I feel that I'm struggling daily to keep my head above water.*

4.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the themes identified following analysis of the narrative interviews. Through extracts from the data, it adds tone and context to underpin the identified themes. It is noted that there were many similarities in the stories told, all of which have had a lasting impact on the participants, albeit with varying degrees of optimism for their future professional status. Chapter Four explores the themes in greater detail, using psycho-social theory. It seeks to go 'below the surface' (Cooper, 2014) to explore conscious and unconscious processes at play at both the individual and organisational levels.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter seeks to explore in greater detail the themes identified in Chapter Four and how these assist with an understanding of the overall aim of the research and addresses the research questions. The discussion presents the findings within the context of my research findings and theory. The research focuses on the lived experience of participants through their narratives of the events leading up to, during and post an Ofsted inspection, where the outcome led to a judgement of inadequate, and considers the internal and external factors that were central to the lived experiences. All of the identified themes are individually significant and each would be worthy of further exploration in their own right.

5.2 Addressing the Research Questions

This study sought to address the emotional and professional journey of children's social care leaders who received an Ofsted inspection judgement of inadequate through an understanding of their lived experience; what was the professional and emotional impact of an inadequate inspection outcome and, how did these leaders make sense of their experience?

This study is unique insofar as it follows the conscious lived experience articulated through the narratives of the research participants. This study, has for the first time, allowed the voice of senior managers to be heard. Too often, I would submit, these

voices have been silenced. The use of settlement agreements with strict confidentiality clauses (please see footnote 11 in 3.6) have been used to 'gag' leaders from being able to enter into discourses about their experiences. As such these valuable insights have, hitherto, been lost. The decision to conduct interviews using narrative inquiry, the opportunity for participants to tell their story in their own words, has, I believe, yielded much richer data than other data collection methods whilst preserving the anonymity of the participants in the choice of the analysis and presentation of the findings. The method goes to the heart of the research questions.

Whilst each story is personal to the individual participants there are also similarities between them. Further questions were added to the narratives that generated the themes (see 3.11). These additional questions were largely framed from areas that I would have further explored if second interviews had taken place. It is these questions that underpin the analysis of the themes highlighted in this chapter.

Themes one to three consider the period leading to the inspection and the period when the inspectors were undertaking the 'fieldwork'. Themes four and five consider the factors that influenced how participants experienced the emotional and professional impact. Themes six, seven and eight seek to offer some insight into what helped with making sense of their experiences. Initially, I thought of this in terms of the process of recovery. However, it became clear that recovery was both relative and subjective, with no simple definition of what a positive and meaningful outcome was.

There are, unsurprisingly, overlaps in each of the discussion areas that highlight what the emotional and professional impact on leaders of an Ofsted judgment of inadequate is and how leaders come to terms with their experience.

The themes are discussed using psycho-social concepts.

Table 6

Identified themes and discussion focus areas

	Theme	Discussion Focus Area
1	Understanding the risk of failure	One
2	The wider ownership of the issues identified	
3	The experience of the inspection I. Individual reflections II. When the inspection unravelled	
4	Responsibility, accountability and blame	Two
5	Experiences of anger and trust	
6	Feelings of loneliness and isolation	Three
7	The impact on emotional well-being	
8	How participants viewed the future	

5.3 Discussion Focus Area One: Understanding the Risks of Failure, Ownership and the Inspection

The initial area for discussion focuses upon the first three themes. The period leading up to the inspection and the inspection itself formed an important part of the narratives of all the participants.

The section starts by considering the primary task of statutory children's social care services. It does so purposely as it is the overture to the significance of an Ofsted inspection. An exploration of why the primary task may be changed or distorted follows

before I comment on the difficulties articulated by the participants of being heard prior to the inspection and some observations about the inspection as it took place.

The common thread for all was that the inspections had been undertaken using the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2013, final update 2017), often abbreviated to SIF. This inspection model for the first time considered all the elements of children's social care services delivery, much of which had been previously subject to stand-alone inspections. The SIF methodology was designed to test all aspects of the early help and children's social care journey and introduced the concept of an evaluation of their 'lived experience'.

The starting point of each story was rooted in the period leading up to the inspection and provided an extremely valuable insight into individual journeys. I had not anticipated that the period leading up to the inspection would form a significant part of the narrative when I was planning the research and thinking about what the participants may wish to say. Initially my own story didn't start at this point, but on reflection later I realised that probably it should have; I vividly recall discussions of my own view that in my organisation there was a lack of preparedness. At the point of the inspection, feelings of being let down, a lack of a wider ownership and internal questions of 'why didn't we, he, she do' were certainly part of my narrative.

The common factor with all the participants that came from the narratives was that they all identified issues and vulnerabilities and to some degree had taken steps to raise this within their organisations, citing external factors related to their own management responsibilities as a major contributory factor.

Of equal note, when participants were discussing the period leading up to the inspection the focus of most of their efforts appeared to be on inspection preparation activity. Having identified issues or challenges, significant effort was given to seeking solutions, with much of this seeming to be in addition, rather than complementary, to the normal day-to-day functions of the role. Put simply, it appeared that effort was being extended in addressing identified shortcomings to meet inspection expectations at any cost.

5.3.1 Defining the Primary Task

An understanding of the psychoanalytically informed concept of the primary task provides a helpful framework of the significance of an Ofsted inspection and how the judgements may have a direct impact on leaders.

As stated elsewhere, the statutory function of a local authority children's social care service is to support vulnerable children and families and protect them from harm. Psycho-dynamically this is known as its primary task. Local authorities are large and complex organisations with numerous statutory functions, delivered by a range of professionals from different disciplines, who are organised into subsets of the organisation. Children's social care services being one such subset. Each of these subsets will also have one or more primary tasks. The overall primary tasks of the local authority organisation is to provide statutory services to an acceptable standard within a finite funding envelope (Rice, 1958).

There is often, I assert, internal tensions within local authorities as each subset of the organisation meets the demands placed on them in the delivery of their primary task(s). This often is manifested through a perception that some subsets are not afforded the same level of priority or importance compared to another subset.

Lawrence's (1977), psychoanalytic framework describing the primary task is helpful when thinking about the participants descriptions of the primary task.. This is especially important in analysing the narratives in relation to what participants thought their roles were and how they believed they were carrying out the primary task known as the existential primary task, and the task people are actually doing, albeit at times on an unconscious level described as the phenomenal task.

It is important to note that all except one of the participants were qualified social workers who had direct experience of working as practitioners prior to their leadership roles. This, I suggest, adds substantially to their insights into the meaning of what the primary task is and the role of both practitioners and leaders in addressing this.

Despite these challenges it there was no indication from any of the interviews that the participants were unclear about the primary task. The following section explores why the primary task may become distorted when organisations faces other internal or external challenges; in this case the challenge was to avoid an inadequate Ofsted inspection outcome.

5.3.2 The Impact of Inspection in Distorting the Primary Task

The central tenet for this study rests on the outcome of an Ofsted inspection of inadequate and how social care leaders experienced this.

In her study of how organisations function and survive an Ofsted inspection, Madembo (2018) suggests that one of the primary roles of the inspection is to gauge the extent to which an organisation is meeting its primary task.

The inspection framework sets out the expectations for the 'normative primary task'. Inspectors will look at how well the normative, the existential and the phenomenal primary tasks align and whether the organisation is aware of differences and their response to these.

Bain and Gould (2000) argue that it would be unusual for groups to always act consistently in line with their primary task and that elements of the primary task may be adjusted either on a temporary or permanent basis to meet emerging issues or demands.

Madembo (2018), citing Hinshelwood and Skogstad (2002), asserts that there needs to be clarity at both the existential and phenomenal task level for teams to complete the primary task. This needs to be shared and understood not only by workers within the service but, I would suggest, within the wider organisation. Further, she states that this is crucial if you want to reduce 'the discrepancies between what is intended to be done (the normative primary task), what is understood as being done (the existential primary task) and what is being done (the phenomenal primary task) (p. 31).

The narratives suggest that participants struggled to articulate within their organisations the realities of the degree of disconnect between what should be happening, what was being presented as happening and the reality of what was happening. The difference between what was being presented as happening and the reality was clearly evoking anxiety. As examples, P1 described commencing his new role and immediately identifying that the service was not in a 'good place'. He recounted that he had come from an authority that had received a good inspection judgement and questioned whether taking this new role had been a 'wise decision'. P3, who again had only recently taken up her role, stated that within a very short period of time she recognised that there were a number of issues of concern. She raised these issues and commented that she was very unpopular for doing so. Her new role was a promotion and she stated that she was concerned that by raising issues she may become known as a 'difficult' person to work with. P7 stated that despite publicly predicting that the authority was likely to achieve a strong 'requires improvement' inspection judgement, this view was not shared by all the senior leadership team. However, there was a reluctance to challenge the prediction due to fear about how this may be received and the impact personally of holding an opposing view.

Obholzer and Miller (2005) comment that in circumstances where the primary task is clear, the ongoing debate about 'what the institution is about and where it is heading' is relatively straightforward. However, where this becomes more complex in terms of ongoing debates is where the organisation has multiple tasks (p. 35).

The impending inspection would suggest that the primary task had changed to achieve a positive inspection outcome and that this potentially confusing message permeated the workforce. The focus of activity seemed to fluctuate from achieving the (original) primary task to surviving an inspection.

5.3.3 The Lone Voice in a (Deaf) Organisation

Defining the primary task and an understanding of how the primary task may be distorted as the children's social care subset of the organisation prepared for the inspection is a critical starting point.

This study highlights how the primary task became distorted primarily in the period leading up to the inspection but also, to a lesser extent, during the inspection as presented by the participants. It is important to state that the primary task was not diluted but additional tasks were added which, at times, seemed to have a more privileged position. Distortion of the primary task can be described as a social defence against anxiety mechanism (Menzies, 1959, Rustin, 2015). It could be argued that many of the additional tasks supported an assessment of the functioning of the primary task which would be a normal part of a quality assurance function, however, almost all of the participants engaged in additional tasks either by commissioning an external review or by preparing 'briefings' for internal audiences. Participants also described new work streams following reviews or the authoring of position statements prepared for briefings whereby they engaged in hastily re-writing policies and procedures, implementing mini service or team reorganisations or revisiting practice standards and expectations for staff

as examples. It was clear that the purpose of this activity was directly related to the impending inspection.

All the participants were relatively new to the role they were in. Some had worked for the organisation and been promoted internally whilst others had joined from outside the organisation. Of significance from the narratives was the participants were concerned about the quality of practice and the subsequent risk of inspection failure. The common theme was one of becoming aware that widely held fantasies, within the organisation, that 'all was well' were misplaced.

Despite these expressed misgivings, often supported by the findings from the externally commissioned reviews or the self-assessments, undertaken by the participants themselves, attempts to engage colleagues in the ownership of the wider issues was a theme. All participants painted a vivid picture of isolation: a lone voice. The extent to which their voices were heard is, as would be expected, subjective. However, the individual accounts are compelling and relatable.

The degree to which individual voices were received seemed to depend on the status of the individual within the organisation, but none appeared to have primacy. Participants described a range of tasks that were undertaken to identify and articulate concerns about the adequacy of the services being delivered. These ranged from formally commissioned external peer reviews, presentations and keeping 'inspection' as an agenda item in most inter- and intra-agency forums.

As already described, local authorities are complex organisations with multiple disparate responsibilities and often a lack of shared perspectives. Members from different parts of an organisation may have different views and these may be contradictory. Often these are unconscious, but they impact significantly on the behaviour of members of the organisation. A coherent and functioning organisation is when there is a shared understanding (Stokes, 2019).

Whilst the extent to which austerity played a part is unclear, since 2010, local authorities have seen a significant decrease in funding from central government. Some participants stated that they were short of resources and attributed areas of poorer performance to this struggle. Attempts to raise these concerns were, in some circumstances, met with hostility. It is easy to see how discussions about additional resources may create tensions, particularly at a time when there were reducing budgets and unchanged or increasing demands on local authority services. Comments in relation to austerity were, in the main, not offered as the primary reason for concerns about performance but did feature. P1, as an example, recounted numerous meetings with both internal and external financial consultants as the organisation grappled with the extent of austerity measures. At the same time he was in discussion with his line manager about the lack of management capacity in his service which was impacting on him being able to confidently reassure senior colleagues that all of the risks were fully understood and that the necessary mitigations could be deployed.

P6 recalled conversations where she was very explicit about the lack of capacity in her service. She recounts being challenged that her description of the risks were generated to create fear but more importantly, were exaggerated.

There also appeared to be differences in perception about the significance of an Ofsted judgment of inadequate or about whether concerns raised may lead to a poor outcome throughout the organisations. This was demonstrated in the narratives when participants described being challenged in meetings or having reports and presentations edited to paint a different, often more positive picture. Both P2 and P5 commissioned an external diagnostic assessment of the quality of the social work practice. In both organisations the outcome was concerning. The response to both assessments paints an illuminating picture. P2 describes how, after significant push back from senior operational staff, he was able to persuade the chief executive that structural change was necessary and urgent. P5 account clearly articulates how her efforts were met with significant hostility. She had prepared a 'presentation' which would provide a framework for dialogue with Ofsted only for this to be amended, by the chief executive, to the point where it became meaningless and potentially, harmful. A key tenet of the inspection framework was an acknowledgement of any deficits in the quality of practice and a clear plan to address these.

Overall, the interviews suggested that there was no sense of a realistic collective grasp of the assessments being presented, acknowledged or owned; in some cases there was over-optimism and in others a degree of indifference. Participants articulated a sense of despair and a lack of professional respect.

Participants often described these conflicts in terms of fantasies being held elsewhere within the system, which believed that concerns raised were pessimistic and

unsubstantiated. The notion of a 'lone voice' flows directly from my observations of these assertions.

Bion's (1962b) concept of containment is theoretically helpful in providing a framework to explore how the increasing anxiety by participants as they prepared for the inspection came to the fore.

Participants articulated a lack of shared ownership not only about the primary task but in how individuals responded to internal and external pressures that were in play in the lead up to, and during, the Ofsted inspection.

Bion's construct of 'nameless dread' has significance. Participants presented numerous examples in their narratives of being faced with traumatic, unpredictable events, and how early primitive anxieties were evoked. They described how their sense of a safe and containing environment had become fractured and how they adopted defences to try and keep these primitive anxieties at bay.

Armstrong (2005) suggests that individuals are influenced to behave in certain ways, both consciously and unconsciously, by the dynamics of the organisation; not only are they influenced by the organisation, but they can also directly influence it. It is argued that the 'organisation in the mind' and how it carries out these functions and what individuals perceive to be the purpose of the organisation (Armstrong, 2018) is naturally distorted by individual actors' own perception of the primary task, the phantasies that support these views, individual survival and defences against anxiety.

The lack of containment at both an individual and organisational level is the thread that runs through the findings.

5.3.4 The culture of Inspection

Inspections have been ever present throughout my social worker career. It is difficult to know whether 'inspection' became more significant within my professional life as I moved up through the various management hierarchical structures or whether there has been a fundamental shift in the prominence of inspection in the identities of organisations.

It seems to me that the notion of inspection readiness and the advent of improvement consultants is a more recent innovation. I personally don't recall the same degree of preparation and emphasis on inspection prior to the commencement of the Ofsted SIF regime in 2013. It may be that for the first time the new assessment framework was looking at the whole system, whereas previously there had been stand-alone inspections of the constituent parts of the system. The participants spoke of the significant activity that surrounded inspection readiness.

It is also possible that Ofsted's embarrassment in relation to the quality of their inspections following the death of Peter Connelly in 2007 may have led to a view that future inspections would be more probing. In 2008, Ofsted published an inspection report of Haringey's children's social care services with a judgement of good. Later, and in the face of public and political scrutiny, they sought to shift the blame, suggesting that

officers at Haringey council had deceitfully provided false data to inspectors, which had influenced their good judgement (Shoesmith, 2016, p. 198).

The study highlights the very real and conscious lived experience evidenced by the participants in their narratives, describing a culture of fear. The (then) chief inspector of Ofsted was interviewed by the BBC on the 23 April 2023 (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001l8ml) where she acknowledged that there was a 'culture of fear' surrounding Ofsted stating that this culture of fear was a consequence of how 'people think about' inspections, especially inadequate judgements. Later she asserted that that the belief an Ofsted inspection leads to more 'unnecessary workload pressures' is a myth. However, Ofsted's own research presented under the umbrella title 'the big listen' (2024) identified that increased workloads were a common feature in inspection preparation. A separate study entitled Ofsted: culture of fear and anxiety (University and college union, 2024) stated that over 90% of respondents stated that that preparation for Ofsted inspections adversely impacts on workload (p. 6). In addition, half of respondents stated that they feared that a negative Ofsted outcome could result in professional reprisal by strongly agreeing or agreeing that 'I fear a negative Ofsted outcome could result in me losing my job' (p. 7).

I suggest that this culture of fear was an important theme in the narratives. Explicit pre-inspection activity, described in the preceding section, served two purposes. The first was a personal validation that the participant fully understood the risk of failure and secondly, an attempt to achieve a wider ownership of these risks (themes one and two in the findings). Both were defence mechanisms against anxiety (Menzies, 1959).

This research project did not set out to evaluate the value or process of an inspection. Whether inspections influence the quality of services or bring about sustained improvements and ultimately ensure that vulnerable children are protected from harm was not central to this project.

All participants understood that inspection was an integral part of an external validation process that seeks to comment upon the effectiveness of the service as a whole. All participants were veterans of inspection. None, except for one, made any criticism of the inspection or inspectors, although there were comments about the demands of the inspection on staff. Together with the pre-inspection activity, these comments paint a picture that disproportionally privileges activities that are solely focused on an inspection outcome rather than activities that improve outcomes (Jones, 2015; Puffett, 2018).

Despite these comments, none of the participants stated that they were at odds with the overall assessment, findings and judgement of the Ofsted inspectors.

5.3.5 Defences

I am mindful that all the interviews with participants were post inspection and, in some circumstances, many months after the inspection. Four of the seven participants had moved on at the request of their employer.

At first glance, it could be argued that many of the individual narratives describing the period leading up to and including the inspection and the efforts taken to make known the possibility of a poor outcome could be described as defensive.

Defence against anxiety is a well-documented psychological phenomenon (Lees et al., 2011 Menzies, 1959; Rustin, 2005).

Freud initially identified the concept of anxiety as a reaction to a state of danger. The concept was further developed by Klein as an unconscious response to reality that is distorted (Rustin, 2005, pp. 234–235). Anxiety can be contained (Bion, 1962). Containment refers to being psychologically held and supported.

Analysis of the individual narratives suggested that the need to expose potential areas of weaknesses that would be identified in the inspection raised issues of organisational vulnerability. The lack of containment (Bion, 1962), through simple acknowledgement or additional actions (i.e. a review of staff resources), did little to address this. It is my submission that it was this lack of containment that directly impacted the feelings of isolation in the wider sense of the 'organisation in the mind' (Armstrong, 2018).

The primary task of children's social care is to prevent harm to children. This goal is primarily delivered through a hierarchical structure of practitioners, first-line leaders and then senior leaders. The role of leaders is to provide direct support and strategic leadership to ensure that the objectives of the primary task are met. Issues of risk and resilience, confidence and competence are crucial to meeting this goal.

Menzies (1959) describes how when faced with anxiety, nursing staff deviated from the primary task by introducing secondary or 'alternative' tasks to reduce anxiety.

Focusing on each narrative, I would suggest that there was a shift in day-to-day activity to address the inspection outcome rather than the primary task, as the idea of failure was emotionally and professionally too painful.

5.4 Discussion Focus Area Two: Blame, Anger, Trust and Agency

In this area I discuss the issues in relation to blame, anger, trust and agency – expanding on themes four and five.

Blame, anger and trust were at the forefront of a significant proportion of participants' narratives, although they were not always explicitly articulated. For some, this was directed at internal actors and for others external ones. Accountability, responsibility and agency were key issues, often returned to at various points in individual narratives.

Trust in 'oneself', or perhaps more accurately described as confidence, was severely challenged by participants, with all questioning their skills and abilities despite leadership experience often spanning several years. There is, as one would expect, a clear overlap between feelings of trust and the impact on emotional well-being, which is discussed further in the next section.

One of the most significant aspects of this study is the extent of political posturing, also known as (political) grandstanding. Posturing may be seen not only in political rhetoric, but also in order to reduce or deflect criticism aimed at public officials. It is common for people to react emotionally rather than rationally

to crisis or controversy. In response, actors may undertake visible yet superficial actions, as these are relatively easy to understand or to see, and they may satisfy emotional responses such as anger or fear more quickly than would be necessary for in-depth substantive responses. If a political actor can take credit for quick response, and if more effective responses are less likely to gain support in the short-term, there may be pressure in favour of political posturing (Chilton, 2004). Tosi and Warmke (2020) use the term "moral grandstanding" to describe similar behaviour where people exaggerate emotions and opinions in a public forum in order to gain social status, especially among people who agree with them. This can also involve public shaming, abandonment of nuance and context, and a mob mentality of trumped-up charges and excessive outrage (p. 11).

Whilst some political grandstanding was described by some participants when they talked about being a lone voice in the organisation in the period leading up to the inspection, political posturing and manoeuvring was much more prevalent following the inspection growing in intensity following the publication of the inspection report. The degree of this grandstanding described by the participants when talking about responsibility, accountability, agency, anger, blame and scapegoating is explored in the following sections. The often frank and honest accounts provide valuable insight into the rarely considered feelings and emotions of the recipients subject to these attacks.

5.4.1 Responsibility and Accountability

From the narratives it was clear that each participant had a clear understanding of the responsibilities of their role and the function of the position they held.

Accountability: the consequences of how well an individual delivers against their responsibilities in performing the necessary actions to address a primary task – whatever the current iteration of the primary task may be – come to the fore. These are often referred to in single words or phrases such as appraisals/targets/performance reviews, etc. but collectively could be described as accountability frameworks.

I think there is no doubt that inspections provide the mechanisms for an accountability framework designed to be understood both within and outside the organisation and which defines (degrees of) success and failure, and Ofsted holds significant power and influence in this framework (Heery, 2018). The significance of Ofsted's power and influence over other accountability frameworks is stark. Responsibility and accountability within an organisation are most usually applied using an appraisal framework. Whilst schemes differ across different organisations, they follow a process whereby several core performance objectives are mutually agreed and assessed, usually on an annual basis.

According to the participants, none were subject to performance capability complaints prior to the inspection. Despite clear competency frameworks being in place, it would appear that the Ofsted judgement was afforded a more privileged position when decisions were made about the future employability of the participants. This included those participants that remained in post.

This said, it was clear that almost all participants were aware of the possible personal consequences of an inspection judgment of inadequate. P1 and P5, for example, recounted that these discussions and decisions were taken swiftly once the outcome was

known, albeit stayed until the publication of the report which remained embargoed by Ofsted for a number of weeks. Both P6 and P7 recounted that they remained in post for a number of months following the outcome becoming public but were aware of the possibility of what the outcome may be for them, albeit with the passage of time they had hoped that moment had passed. The remaining participants remained in post but described the immense pressure they felt under to maintain their roles.

5.4.2 The Extent to which Participants Were Able to Maintain Agency

The concept of agency incorporates independence of thought and analysis, which supports autonomous decision-making. This capacity to make choices and act on them requires a high degree of self-reflectivity.

Freud described agency as the mental state that encompasses what a person thinks, feels and wills. Further, in his early papers, he states that personal agency may fail through the operations of 'counter-will' (Caston, 2011, p. 908). In simplistic terms, Freud's early work referred to conscious and unconscious processes as 'will' and 'counter-will'. However, as his theories developed it is suggested that his use of 'counter-will' to describe unconscious processes ended in 1912 (Thompson, 1994, p. 21). Psychologically, agency is not a unconscious process. It describes the sense of control that one feels in one's life, ones capacity to influence their own thoughts and behaviour, and have faith in their ability to handle a wide range of tasks and situations. Ones sense of agency helps you to be psychologically stable, yet flexible in the face of conflict or change (Bandura, 1997, p. 27).

The brain appears to actively construct the sense of agency, and because of this, our experiences of agency can be quite divorced from the facts. These lapses reveal something quite remarkable about our sense of agency: its impressive flexibility (Moore, 2016).

The burden of an Ofsted judgment of inadequate added an additional layer of pressure. To differing extents, and according to individual circumstances, all participants expressed feelings of powerlessness as a result of their inability to influence the outcome of the inspection, even though they were front and centre stage and the focus was being held accountable. For some at a more senior level, the level of assumed accountability was greater than that of less seniority and responsibility, although this did not appear to lessen the anxiety experienced by individual participants.

An inadequate Ofsted judgement is among the most significant career-defining events experienced by senior leaders and can trigger a fundamental shift in a career narrative that had been successful to that point, both in terms of external views and validation and the individual's self-evaluation (Heery, 2018, p. 84). Each participant started their narrative with a career synopsis, positively outlining their achievements and experience.

Commenting about school inspection, Perryman (2007) states that the emotional impact of the inspection with its fear and loss of control and sense of self can in the worse cases lead to [teachers] being unable to continue their work (pp. 25–26). I sensed that this was a very real emotion during and post inspection.

The lack of ability to influence the outcome of the inspection and maintain agency was also compounded by the events immediately post the publication of the inspection report. Participants who left their roles almost immediately spoke about how they felt sidelined and marginalised, with examples of how they were forced to become part of the audience in post-inspection briefings or were banned from having discussions with colleagues. For those that remained in post, even if this was relatively short-lived, the impact of the influence of external commissioners, improvement partners and the Ofsted monitoring visits by inspectors left them feeling powerless. Leaders may have known what they needed to do but actions that they would have normally had some control over were prescribed for them.

I would also suggest that in order to maintain agency it is important to take control of narratives. It follows that this would be more successful for participants in more senior positions. The individual participants' accounts support this assumption in relation to the participant in the most senior role (described as a tier one role in my findings chapter). However, for staff in tier two and tier three roles this picture was mixed. P4 and P5 appeared to have more control albeit if only to determine the point at which they moved on.

The question of the extent to which participants were able to maintain agency in light of this negative professional event and the pressures in terms of accountability is, I would suggest, dependent upon the individual experiences. Agency, as a predominantly unconscious state, is influenced by processes of transference and countertransference (Breuer et al., 2000, pp. 222–240). The attribution of responsibility is one of the key

social functions of the sense of agency. Humans place a premium on responsibility and people are held responsible for what they do (Frith et al., 2000, pp. 1771–1788).

Therefore, I would suggest, the extent to which participants were able to maintain agency was very dependent on self-observation: the ability to take ownership of one's personal attributes and actions that maintain competent agency and the appropriateness of this in the context of responsibility and accountability (Caston, 2011, pp. 919–920).

5.4.3 Anger as a Psychological State

All the participants articulated feeling 'angry' when describing their experiences of specific events. However, none related to the process of the inspection activity, or was directed at the inspectors, or at the final judgement. It was, however, expressed as an emotion when participants relayed their experiences of events leading up to and post inspection. The words anger or angry did not feature prominently. It was the interpretation of what was being said that led my analysis of the feelings of anger.

Anger is a primary emotion provoked typically by frustration (Rycroft, 1998, p. 8). When you're feeling vulnerable or attacked, it can lead to a set of conscious and unconscious actions or negative emotions. Many people also use anger as a defence mechanism to keep people away and provide a feeling of control over a situation.

Anger is a very subjective emotion. What makes one person angry may not bother another person at all. The emotion of anger can be set off by both internal and external

triggers. Certain situations can make you angry – particularly when you feel like you have no control over circumstances.

There are three basic types of anger that psychologists recognise as being different emotional states. The first is a defence mechanism that occurs when we feel threatened or trapped. The second form of anger exists as a reaction to the interpretation of events in which we believe we are deliberately being harmed or treated unfairly. The last type of anger is the irritable, sullen anger more closely associated with personality than with emotion (Ohwovoriole, 2023).

> Another important aspect of anger and psychopathology involves so-called 'narcissistic injuries' or blows to one's sense of self and self-esteem. When one's feelings are hurt, or when one is criticised/shamed/humiliated, this kind of stimulation leads to distress. (Holinger, 2017)

Splitting and projection (Klein, 1923) is a very important mechanism with anger, although it may not necessarily be a conscious response. Some participants talked about being the recipients of 'angry' outbursts from peers and superiors. For others, this projection was played out when they were sidelined or humiliated – an example being when one participant (P5) was forced to sit in an audience whilst the chief executive apportioned blame for the poor outcome. It could be argued that the examples given demonstrate how possible feelings of guilt, avoidance and responsibility were projected on the workers to find fault and apportion blame.

Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification is an extension of projection. Segal's (2004) explanation of projective identification is helpful:

> ...involves a phantasy in which some aspect of the self, felt as unbearable, is got rid of into someone else. The person then no longer feels that this aspect of themselves (including the feelings attached to it) belong to them. Their relationship with the other person is deeply coloured by their investment of a part of themselves in the other person. (p. 37)

Later, Segal (2004) suggests that this projection may be used as a control method over someone or as a punishment (p. 37). This concept provides a helpful framework when thinking about why participants expressed feelings of anger. Although developed as an expansion of Klien's (1923) theory of splitting and projection, projective identification was more prominent in the description of anger.

Bion (1962b) developed Klein's theory and suggested that projective identification can be a normal form of communication. These responses led to Bion's theory of containment (Segal, 2004, p. 38). He further suggested that intolerable anxiety can lead to an excessive use of projective identification with the other person becoming the feared object or object of hate that needs to be defended against (Bion, 1962b). This lack of containment meant that negative thoughts were projected into participants which they were unable to process to feel contained. Projective identification as a social defence mechanism against anxiety allowed for an avoidance of any shared ownership of the inspection outcome by locating the failure in participants.

The notion of projective identification posits a theory that the recipient of the projection resonates or somehow identifies with the projection from someone and ends up acting or feeling in ways that combine this persons projection and their own feelings.

As an example, P4 was relatively new to her role when her authority was judged to be inadequate following an Ofsted inspection. Whilst she described her manager as 'pleasant', she often was often identified, by the same manager, as inexperienced. In interview, it became clear that P4 felt that these comments were a projection from her manager that she lacked competence. As a result, she began to identify with the projection and lost confidence in making independent decisions and often spent significant periods of time justifying her role. This continued until she decided to move on. Reflecting, she was able to acknowledged that it was her manager's projection was his own anxieties of how he was perceived. Following her resignation feelings of anger emerged as she felt that she has been unfairly labelled.

Participants described projections of fear, dread, disappointment and frustration from others. They concluded that they were being blamed and punished. In simple terms, they described how others were distancing themselves from the outcome, even to the point where others avoided communicating with them.

4.4.4 Blame and Scapegoating

The previous three sections consider responsibility, accountability, agency and anger. These sections are linked by similar feelings and emotions. These are natural emotional responses, which whilst uncomfortable do not necessarily lead to longer term

psychological distress. Apportioning blame and scapegoating can be described as an overtly direct attack which locates failure to an identifiable individual or group. As described earlier, it is a form of a social defence mechanism but from a position of conscious thought. Consequently, as suggested by the participants in the study, blame and scapegoating may have a much greater emotional impact.

All participants talked about blame, albeit these comments were differently nuanced. For those that lost their roles as a direct result of the inspection outcome, these comments were framed as being blamed by commentators who were both external to and internal in their organisations. The two participants who remained in post spoke vividly of their sense of external blame – for example, in their interactions with the government-appointed commissioners or Ofsted inspectors involved in the monitoring visits.

It is a basic tenet that all actions have consequences, good or bad, positive or negative. Most appear inconsequential to our day-to-day being – that is, they are performed as an unconscious act. Some, however, may involve a deliberate act insofar as the possible outcome is known and considered, judgements are made and possible risks are analysed (Mason, 2009, p. 78). The theory of consequentialism, whether something is good or bad, depends on the outcome. As an ethical theory, it holds that generally an act is right if, and only if, the act will produce a greater balance of good than not in doing the act.

This concept of consequentialism differs, I would argue, from notions of blame and scapegoating.

Blame and scapegoating focus on the need to find fault, to censure, revile, reproach. It is an emotional process that seeks to discredit the blamed. Paul (1997) argues that blaming is more than just a process of allocating fault. It seeks to shame and undermine people, looking for something wrong with them. Blame is often a knee-jerk and mostly futile solution to complex problems, providing a simplistic view of a complex reality. Blame generates fear and destroys trust, and it is often a barrier to understanding the root of an issue. Those that seek to apportion blame tend to do so to excuse their own actions as a defence against challenges they face (Paul, 1997, pp. 1–6).

There were many examples of the practical consequences of blame and scapegoating articulated by the participants. As already stated, many of the responses in relation to responsibility, accountability, agency and anger can be considered, using psychoanalytic concepts as unconscious defences against anxiety (Rustin, 2015). However, blame and scapegoating are rooted in denial and 'othering' (Shoesmith, 2016) and are a conscious response. P1 and P5, who both were asked to leave their organisations shortly after the publication of the inspection report, gave examples of the public humiliation associated with being blamed. P1 spoke about remaining in post immediately after the inspection prior to the report being published but not being allowed to speak with his manager. He further recalled that peers from other parts of the organisation would actively avoid him making it clear that they were privy to knowledge of the embargoed judgement. P5 recalled being sat in an audience of peers and subordinates where the chief executive was outlining why Ofsted had concluded that practice was inadequate and who was at fault. P6 and P7 who were ousted some months after the inspection report was made public, and in both cases where senior leaders had changed, both recounted that they felt that they were being scapegoated. In all cases,

participants described feeling humiliated and unable to challenge the accusations being levelled against them due to confidentiality clauses in settlement agreements.

5.5 Discussion Focus Area Three: The Emotional Impact and Professional Future

The final three themes are addressed in this section.

There is, as one would expect, a clear overlap between feelings of isolation and loneliness and the impact on emotional well-being. For some, descriptions of feelings of isolation and loneliness also seemed to capture the emotional responses of shame and embarrassment.

There were many factors that came into play that impacted on the emotional well-being of the participants. For all participants there is the period between the end of the fieldwork where the indicative grade is confirmed and the formal publication of the report with the confirmed judgement, which was described in various ways as challenging.

All participants referred to their mental health and emotional well-being. Participants spoke using identical terms. Words such as ‘humiliation’, ‘depression’, ‘broken’ and ‘horrific’ featured widely.

The notion of survival played an important part in each narrative and was expressed in different ways. For some, survival was about getting to the reinspection unscathed, whereas for others, survival did not extend beyond the next monitoring visit.

Discussions about their futures followed similar lines. They talked vividly about the impact of the inspection on them personally, professionally and emotionally.

5.5.1 All by Myself – a Lonely Existence

Similarly to the issues explored in 4.4.4, where participants felt they were a lone voice, all participants conveyed feelings of isolation from the point that the provisional and unmoderated inspection judgement was known (for some this was part way through the inspection fieldwork and for others at the end of the fieldwork).

Feelings of isolation were more acute with some participants than others, especially where decisions about the future of the participant were already being made. Isolation encompassed both physical and emotional elements.

Emotional isolation can be described as an unwillingness or inability to share one's feelings with others. When socially isolated individuals lack emotional interaction and support, they can become emotionally numb – detached from their own feelings.

As described previously when exploring other themes, issues concerning a lack of containment (Bion, 1962) featured extensively in the narratives during this period and for those who remained in post for the duration of their employment.

When thinking about individual participants' experiences, it was important to bear in mind that the normal functions of the organisation needed to continue. For most

of the workforce, life went on interrupted, although until the publication of the inspection outcome it was predicated on numerous fantasies of what may happen. Post publication, these fantasies changed with increased anxiety about what the outcome may mean more extensively across the organisation.

I was drawn to Jude Toasland's (2007) paper 'Containing the Container'. She initially explored how in her role as supervisor she is expected to contain the anxieties of her supervisees. Exploring Bion's (1962) three types of container-contained relationships, she concludes that it is the commensal relationship that benefits both parties from mutual containment in a peer relationship (pp. 199–200).

Citing Cooper (2005b), she highlights his view that social care agencies have struggled to contain workers' anxieties and how workers have been expected to manage their own anxieties (p. 201).

Finally, Toasland (2007) considers issues of uncontained teams and where the manager is unable to contain staff anxiety. In turn, this lack of containment means that staff will struggle to contain the anxieties of their clients (p. 201).

Returning to Bion's (1962) definition of container-contained relations, she explains the concept of a parasitic relationship where the manager is able to receive the workers' projections but is unable to process these and return them in a containing, manageable way. Instead, the manager 'holds' these feelings themselves, thus creating an unhealthy dependent relationship (Toasland, 2007, p. 200).

Dependency or degrees of increased dependency with subordinates following an inspection were not articulated within the narratives. However, my observations would suggest that anxiety levels increase, and staff presented as less contained.

It follows, I would suggest, that a lack of containment was a significant aspect with participants feeling isolated and, in some circumstances, marginalised. Defences against anxiety meant that participants who were uncontained were unable to function as commensal containers for the staff they managed. It is possible that this led to an unconscious retreat from the normal social interactions between leaders and workers, thereby increasing feelings of isolation.

Just as participants articulated increased activity in preparation for the inspection, additional activity was also a feature post inspection. Following an inadequate Ofsted inspection judgement there is a rapid wave of improvement and recovery actively, driven in part, by the need for the local authority to submit an improvement plan to Ofsted (Ofsted, 2013). There is also a need to provide evidence and reassurance to a central government appointed commissioner that the local authority has the capacity to bring about the necessary improvements and the statutory children's social care function should remain under the direct control of the local authority[18].

Such activity was described by participants, who remained in their roles, as including production of new policies and procedure, increased audit and compliance monitoring, and an greater emphasis on competency and capability within the workforce. Participants expressed some resentment to the demands being placed upon them,

[18] Pursuant to powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996

including comments in relation to the impact of their physical health and their private lives.

5.5.2 The Emotional State

Making sense of participants' emotional states was complex. Upon reflection, I suggest that issues of transference and countertransference came into play within the individual interviews. This is explored further in 5.7.

At the time of each interview, participants did not present in distress. However, this did not appear to be the case at earlier points in the participants' lived experience. As participants told their stories I was drawn, at times, to my own experience of grief and loss.

The starting point for exploring grief and loss is an understanding of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby's work was concerned with the parent-child relationship and how secure attachments were formed and sustained (Bacchus, 2021).

Yip et al. (2017) consider attachment theory in work situations. They explore why and how people develop emotional bonds at work and how the conditions or events in a work environment influence how these relationships develop, are sustained and at times fracture between employees and work-related functions (p. 185). They suggest that there is a direct correlation between secure workplace attachments and relationships, which determines the quality of the outcomes.

The parallels of how people respond to bereavement provides a framework for some of my observations of individual participants explanations of their emotional states. Situated in the theoretical models of the stages of grieving (Kübler-Ross & Byock, updated 2014, Bowlby and Parkes, 1970, Worden, 1989) the common premise of the models is that people need to navigate their way through the stages to successfully cope with their loss. Importantly, this is not a linear process, and people may return to an earlier stage or become stuck in a particular stage.

Bacchus (2021) describes how this non-linear process of grief can be defined as a dual model of coping with loss. It is an adaptive process caused by oscillating between restoration orientation (attending to life changes, distraction from grief, etc.) and loss orientation (grief work, avoidance of restoration, etc.) Parkes (1986) briefly considered his theory when exploring other types of loss, including unemployment. He concluded that many of the emotions that he described in his original theory, jointly published with John Bowlby, were evident, although some such as anger, guilt and acceptance may be excessive and prolonged or inhibited and inclined to emerge in a distorted form (p. 202).

The interviews for this study were carried out with participants who were at different points of time from the inspection judgement. In addition, each journey was unique with individual experiences shaping the narratives. What was clear, however, is that the emotional states articulated by the participants were not directly attributable to any specific outcome. For example, both P2 and P5 who remained in their substantive roles without significant censure expressed similar views as to the emotional impact of their journey as those who were dismissed from their roles.

Descriptions such as feeling distraught (P1), coming close to having a mental breakdown (P3), I did survive, but I got close to being broken (P2), and feeling of anxiety, worry and distress (P6), vividly highlight the emotional impact of their experiences.

Much has been written about the emotional impact of Ofsted inspections on teachers (Davis, 2012; Learmonth, 2000; Perryman, 2007) and this is replicated in the narratives of the participants in this study. As witnessed earlier in 2023, following the tragic suicide of head teacher Ruth Perry, the impact on the mental and emotional health of individuals leading organisations where Ofsted has judged their performance to be inadequate can be profound with devastating consequences.

5.5.3 Survival of the…… Just Survival

At the time of the individual interviews only one of the seven participants remained in their substantive role from the point of the inspection. Four of the participants had been dismissed from their roles and the remaining two had moved to new roles voluntarily. Of particular note was the fact that none of the participants that had changed roles had secured new positions at the same level of seniority or responsibility.

Of the four participants that were dismissed, two left their roles almost immediately following the official publication of the inspection report and two left a few months after.

In 2014, Professor Eileen Munro was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the new Ofsted inspection framework that stated, ‘it is not helpful to sack a DCS who

is leading a major programme of reform just because the expected improvements are not appearing quickly' (Munro, 2014, p. 9). I would suggest that this sentiment also applies to participants that held other senior roles.

Exploring the narratives of those staff that were dismissed, distorted narratives emerged, unchallenged, that individuals were personally responsible and as such should not be part of any improvement journey. Shoesmith (2016) refers to 'distortions of public accountability' from her experience that her (eventual) dismissal was not based on competence or a record of delivering good services, but the need for someone to be seen to be responsible to bring about 'closure' (pp. 185–194). At a time of chronic shortages of experienced social care professionals, this could be described as reckless.

Perhaps the way in which most participants navigated new employment in roles at a less senior level than those they were in at the time of the inspection is of less importance than the reasons why.

I think all the participants described working in organisations where there was a lack of containment (Cooper, 2005b). However, the proverb 'once bitten, twice shy' comes to mind – the position where you are frightened to do something again because you had an unpleasant experience doing it the first time. I would suggest that both conscious and unconscious processes are at play, with the avoidance of potential future psychological harm being a paramount consideration. Survival became a conscious construct not to expose themselves to future, unbearable pain.

A thread that was common in the narratives, but more pronounced with more senior leaders, was the perceived loss of professional identity. Professional identity or 'status' was important to participants. High-pressure professional roles often link self-worth to careers, with their professional identity defining who they are (Morgan, 2021). Even for those leaders who remained on post, it was clear that they felt that their professional identity had been negatively impacted by the inspection outcome. For those participants that had moved on, it was clearer that they were struggling to define who they were professionally and articulate this confidently when thinking about their future careers.

5. 6 A restorative approach

Restorative practice was initially developed in the late nineties and early twenties and was applied to the criminal justice system as a way to break the punishment cycle of criminal behaviour. It is a relational approach that seeks to repair relationships rather than assign blame, often with direct face to face victim involvement or though victim statements. Over time restorative practice has gained traction, and its use can be seen in a variety of settings including schools where it is effective in managing behaviour, children's social care services - for example family group conferences[19], and in workplaces, to give a few examples. It can used as a way of addressing internal associated complaints associated with the behaviour of others. The premise is based on a belief that

[19] A family group conference is a family-led decision-making process in which the family and friends network come together where decisions need to be made about the safety and welfare of a family member, and a plan needs to be established and negotiated.

individual involved in a conflict should be actively involved in identifying a resolution and mitigating the negative consequences (Hopkins, 2015).

Feelings of be blamed, scapegoated or both (discussed at 5.4.4), was prevalent in all of the narratives. Unpinning these feelings was the less overtly articulated feeling of shame, which was very powerful emotion unconsciously expressed by the participants. I would argue from my own experience, that shame is an immensely private emotion, and captured conflicting feelings of letting down the organization, my colleagues and subordinates, the children and families that I had a responsibility for, and myself. Whilst shame is an internalised feeling 'being shamed' is a public activity. Braithwaite (1989) develop the reintegrative shaming theory. Whilst I do not propose to delve too deeply into the genesis of the theory, he makes two important distinctions and observations of different kinds of shame, which I feel are helpful in the context of a restorative approach. The first is stigmatic shame which he argues is counter-productive leading to humiliation and distancing from the 'wrongdoing'. The second, which he called reintegrative shame which focusses on the condemnation of the wrongdoing rather than the person, 'which means that person can feel ashamed of their actions but also be reaffirmed of their worth' (Jülich and Cox, 2013, p. 13). The importance of these two distinctions is, I would assert, central to the use of a restorative approach as opposed to an approach the seeks to blame and scapegoat.

I have considered whether a restorative practice approach would have provided a fairer and more transparent framework to address the inspection outcome of inadequate and individual accountability and responsibility. I feel on balance, it would have.

Each of the participants narratives vividly provided an insight into their lived experiences over a period of time. It is acknowledged that each of these journey's did not conclude in the same way, but nonetheless, there were many similarities. Of the seven participants four were dismissed as a direct result of the inspection judgement albeit, the circumstances of these dismissals were different. Two participants remained in their roles but resigned at a point in the future and prior to their interviews, and the final participant remained in their role. All three described the period that they remained in the organization as challenging due to the intense internal and external activity and felt the need for someone to blame was still a recurring theme. As already argued, the need to blame and scapegoat is an expedient way to put distance between the different actors and their levels of accountability and responsibility as a social defence mechanism. The cost both emotionally and professionally to the recipients being blamed, outlined in the narratives were significantly devastating.

A restorative approach that focused on reintegrative shame, I assert, may have substantially reduced the psychological impact from the feelings of being blamed and scapegoated preserving the recipients' feelings of worth. It is, of course, quite possible that reparations may have included discussions about the future role of each participant within the organisation, but such discussion would be inclusive of all involved.

5.7 Data Collection – the Stories and their Tellers

In this final section, issues in relation to data collection are explored.

Challenges in the identification of participants are discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.7). It was, however, a surprise that few potential participants agreed to be part of the study. As a profession, social work is steeped in academic theoretical traditions, with a focus on research and evidence-based practice being a professional mantra.

It was intended that the interviews would be conducted using FANI methodology (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). The method, discussed in more detail in Chapter Two (2.11), is comprised of multiple (2–3) interviews with each participant. A significant tenet of the FANI method is that of the "defended subject" to indicate that people will defend themselves against any anxieties in the information they provide in a research context (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. xv).

Over the course of the interviews, the researcher and researched become co-producers of meanings of the data whereby narratives are central, in which participants′ free associations are given precedence over narrative coherence (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. xii).

Initial interviews were held with each of the participants and ranged from two to three hours in duration. At the end of the initial interview, participants were informed that they would be sent a transcript of the interview with a date for a follow-up interview.

Information about the study was sent to all participants prior to their agreement to proceed and included the comment that the project design would require two interviews.

In every circumstance, none of the participants that continued with the study wanted to participate in a subsequent interview. The absence of at least one subsequent interview could be considered material in considering whether those data collected from the initial interview were sufficient for reliable conclusions to be drawn without an opportunity for further exploration for clarification. I would, however, offer the following observations. Firstly, each initial interview was of significant length and participants were able to start and conclude their narratives at points that were significant for them. Secondly, a transcription of each interview was shared with the respective participants where they were invited to make factual corrections if they felt this relevant. I therefore assumed that factual inaccuracies or other issues of concern would have been raised with me.

One participant, who withdrew from the study following the initial interview, did agree to attend a second interview where they explained that they had felt that the initial interview had been too exposing for them. Interestingly, this participant has recently retired from a senior role and was clear that they had no intention of seeking similar roles, in any form, in the future.

I was unable to explore why this participant found the initial interview to be too exposing and what this meant. I could only hypothesise that the telling of their story, which was rich with data, had evoked memories that were too painful to process. Both Rustin (2005) and Cooper (2005a) described processes in which social workers enacted defences against recognising the reality of circumstances (Rustin, 2005) and ‘turning a blind eye’ and entering a state of true denial (Cooper, 2005a) as an unconscious need to not see what was unbearable.

It is possible that similar issues arose with the remaining participants, but they did not articulate these concerns and were happy to let their narratives be used.

The influence of transference and countertransference is also a key consideration. Within a clinical setting the concept of countertransference is one whereby the clinician unconsciously communicates their feelings back to the patient. Caution is advised, however, about the application of the theories of transference and countertransference as applied within clinical settings within a research setting (Stamenova & Hinshelwood, 2018, p. 5).

Citing Froggett and Hollway, Stamenova and Hinshelwood (2018) highlight the use of countertransference as a focus of the researcher's emotional response. They also point to other research (Frosh, 2010) that highlights the dangers of attributing the researcher's feelings to research subjects (p. 6).

I was also aware that during the interview with the participant that withdrew from the study, I felt irritation when it was explained that they had made a decision that the subordinate with direct operational responsibility for the children's social care service was to be removed from their role. It seemed to me, at the time, that this action had been taken as an act of self-preservation. It was the only time in any of the interviews that I had felt negatively about a participant, and I am left wondering whether this 'irritation' was played out in the interview. I am open to the notion that as neither a clinician nor an experienced researcher, but a researcher with similar experiences, countertransference may have played a part.

The motivation for agreeing to take part in the study is not known. It is quite possible that simply telling their story and being heard was sufficient. It could also be that by sharing their narratives this validated their feelings of blame, victimisation and scapegoating.

Cooper (2018a), in his paper 'Hearing the Grass Grow', asserts that research is about generating new knowledge, but he suggests that it is also about enlarging the scope of our self-knowledge. To achieve this, we need to be emotionally and ideologically open to the possibility of discovering something new, including things that we may not want to know (p. 191). Upon reflection, my own position straddled that of both 'victim and perpetrator'. Immediately post inspection I sought to 'identify' those, both peers and subordinates, I considered 'responsible' for the poor outcome. Through conscious and unconscious processes, I sought to defend myself against the anxiety of the emerging criticism of the poor leadership through the projection of my own failings onto others.

There is a possibility that the agreement to take part in this study was, for some at least, an unconscious need to explore and identify things about themselves. Cooper (2018a) talks about this in the concept of 'practice-near research', which may transform both researchers and research subjects insofar as the research act itself is an interpretive one, while the truth of the data is in part dependent on the interpretive framework of the researcher (p. 198). It might be argued that for these participants there is a close correlation to the ontological and epistemological assumptions outlined in this study.

There are, of course, other explanations, not least that the fieldwork/data collection was undertaken in between periods of Covid-imposed lockdowns. It is

important, however, that the richness of the data gathered through the initial interviews was not lost or distorted by an absence of further interviews.

This study provided a platform for senior managers in children's social care who had received a judgment of inadequate to give a candid account of their experiences. To date these accounts have been missing from any dialogue about the impact of an inadequate inspection outcome.

5. 8 Chapter Summary

This chapter develops the findings and themes outlined in Chapter Three. The application of psychoanalytic theories, concepts and ideas is used to offer insight into the emotional processes at play.

Themes are grouped into three discussion points to address the research questions, although it is acknowledged that there are significant overlaps across all the themes when viewed through a psycho-social lens. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the issues with data collection.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter highlights the key issues that emerged from the study as it seeks to address the research questions. I offer some recommendations for consideration. Strengths and limitations of the project are explored together with views about future research. The chapter concludes with some final personal reflections of my research journey.

6.2 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

This small-scale research project was designed to explore the lived experience of local authority senior children's social care leaders who were exposed to an inadequate Ofsted inspection outcome. In exploring the lived experience, the study also sought to understand what the emotional and professional impact on leaders who received an inadequate judgement was and how these leaders made sense of their experience.

The study is unique insofar as it captures the narratives and lived experiences of senior children's social care leaders as they prepared, facilitated and responded to an Ofsted inspection and outcome. These deeply personal stories offer insight into the emotional experience of a perception of professional failure.

This study provided a platform for senior managers in children's social care who had received a judgment of inadequate to give a candid account of their experiences.

These hitherto unheard voices play a critical part in adding to a body of professional knowledge that can be used to inform future practice.

Psycho-social constructs and theories were used to explore the conscious and unconscious processes at play as both individuals and organisations defended themselves against anxiety.

6.3 Key Issues

Although the research focused upon a specific event in time – an Ofsted inspection – the research highlighted wider issues regarding how organisational cultures fostered very different views about how well the organisation was functioning. All the participants' organisations held psychological 'phantasies' about the quality and effectiveness of services that were not grounded in reality. Of significance and evidenced throughout were the different views held on how tasks and activities are organised, structured and connected at both a conscious and unconscious level. At an individual unconscious level, the 'organisation in the mind' influences the internal images, emotions and values that directly influence the leadership response. This is where, I would argue, there is greater synergy in the 'organisation in the mind' in which the responses both pre and post inspection can create both a learning culture and a containing environment.

The key issues which emerged in this study are:

- Organisations are defined by their leaders. Ineffective leadership is often characterised by an abdication of responsibility and a withdrawal from their roles

that results in organisations without a clear direction. There was limited, if any, evidence that leaders above those who participated in the research (including political leaders) provided clear direction. This vacuum indicates that organisations are left without containment.

- For senior leaders the primary task, namely the protection and support of vulnerable children from significant harm, was constantly shifting to meet the expectations of securing a positive Ofsted outcome.

- The process of inspection left leaders isolated from their peers and wider colleagues.

- Accountability and responsibility were replaced with blame and scapegoating. In some cases, the recovery of the organisation was prioritised over the emotional distress of leaders who were being blamed and scapegoated.

- The lack of containment meant that leaders felt devalued and excluded. This was particularly apparent once the inspection was concluded as organisations sought damage limitation. Leaders felt 'silenced'.

- The outcome of the Ofsted inspection was career limiting. Notably, this was due, in the main, to self-imposed conditions where the participants did not wish to place themselves in roles in which there was a risk of similar experiences.

- None of the participants commented negatively about the value of inspection or the approach by the Ofsted inspectors carrying out the task. It is clear, however, that all the participants found the totality of the inspection process extremely challenging.

- The data suggest that the process of inspection, especially in the way that organisations respond to the outcome, is potentially very damaging and destructive to the individuals involved both on a professional and personal basis.

6.4 Implications for Practice

This research exposes the emotional impact of Ofsted failure for senior leaders at the centre of the process and provides a voice for their experiences. The response to the poor Ofsted judgement varied among the participants, with more senior leaders more likely to remain in post than more junior members of the leadership teams. The reason for this was not explored but is likely to be due to the relationship of these senior leaders with chief executives and political leaders.

This study did not seek to comment upon the efficacy of an Ofsted inspection in driving up performance and improving the outcomes for vulnerable children and their families; such comments are irrelevant as there is no plan to cease this activity.

This study adopted psychoanalytic theory to look below the surface at individual and organisation dynamics that impact on effective leadership. A wider view of effective leadership and competent leaders seemed only to come to the fore at the point that local

authority children's services were found wanting after the Ofsted inspection judgement. Social work is a complex and emotive field. Leaders carry significant responsibility for services that seek to protect some of the most vulnerable members of our communities in the face of public scrutiny and external validation.

Despite working as part of a wider senior management team, participants articulated feeling isolated and, in some instances, marginalised. No participants spoke of a clear framework of support and containment. Instead of embarking on reflective and reflexive journeys, some organisations simply seem to perpetuate a 'phantasy' to project to Ofsted that the bad object has been expelled and got rid of – the bad object being the individual. The obvious risk is that measures to provide a safe and containing environment for leaders are not appropriately addressed.

The research has highlighted deficits in a 'whole organisation' approach to children's social care inspection. Inspection preparation or post-inspection activity has become a distinct activity. The growth in the roles of 'improvement consultants' has gained traction yet seems to sit outside the normal quality assurance functions that already exist. Many of these roles are considered temporary and are filled by consultants, often at significant cost.

This study provides a framework that can help organisations to think about how senior leaders are recruited, developed and supported in the complex task of delivering safe and effective children's social care services. There is a risk that the absence of a clear process whereby leaders experience being contained and supported may deter potential future leaders.

This study, I hope, will encourage discourse about what 'support' looks like. The value of the research is that each individual narrative paints an uncensored portrait of how individuals reacted and responded to complex challenges and emotions and how, through both conscious and unconscious processes, they sought to defend themselves against these anxieties. These were often seen as organisational defences.

This study exposes some of the tensions between supporting practice improvement from within the authority's existing management group and the need to be seen to hold leaders to account.

6.5 Recommendations for Consideration

- Inspection needs to be viewed as a process rather than an event. At any given time a local authority will be planning for, participating in or responding to an Ofsted inspection. This needs to be acknowledged, appropriately resourced and supported throughout the wider organisation.

- The concept of 'experts by experience' should be adopted with leaders' views of areas of concern being afforded the appropriate priority. Inspection should be viewed as an opportunity to learn about what is working well as well as what needs to change, within the wider context of the practice system.

- Local authorities should move beyond seeking to identify individuals to blame for poor inspections by identifying collective responses.

- Local authorities should develop a restorative practice framework that could address staffing issues following an unsatisfactory inspection outcome.

- Readers with supervisory responsibilities are encouraged to reflect on their own management styles. The differences between competence and confidence need to be acknowledged and responded to appropriately. An Ofsted judgment of inadequate does not automatically translate into individual competency issues and therefore careful analysis of the inspection judgement; what needs to change, and how, should always be privileged over knee-jerk reactions to appease a need that someone must be 'at fault'.

- Leadership development should use clear theoretical constructs, in particular psycho-social concepts in relation to organisation and group relations, defences against anxiety and developing containing/contained environments, that add meaning and underpin how organisations can support effective management.

- Supervision should always afford the supervisee an opportunity to raise issues that they are anxious about.

- Self-assessments about the strengths and areas of improvement in the quality of services need to be shared and owned across the whole system, including members and key partners.

- Leaders should be afforded courtesy and dignity when they are leaving an organisation, including being the author of communication about their leaving and holding leaving events.

- Confidentiality clauses in settlement agreements should not be used as these only seek to further 'silence' individuals. Local authorities should instead feel confident about robustly defending their decisions should the need arise through an evidence-based response.

- Staff who are exiting the organisation due to an Ofsted judgment of inadequate should have access to employee emotional support schemes for a reasonable period.

6.6 Strengths and Limitations

This research was undertaken to gain an understanding of the experiences of leaders when faced with a poor Ofsted inspection outcome, the impact on their professional identity and their emotional well-being. Careful thought was given, and steps taken, to ensure that the findings and subsequent account and analysis were robust and reliable. Strengths and limitations were identified as the research project progressed and consolidated at the end of the project.

There is a wide body of research that explores the impact of inspection on school leaders. This research adds to, but also expands on, the experiences of school leaders by investigating the experiences of children's social care leaders, who are subject to similar

methodologies in the inspection and evaluation of the quality and efficacy of the services being provided.

This study contributes to an emerging body of knowledge that goes beneath the surface of the emotional impact of inspection activity for those in positions of responsibility and accountability. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the study pointed out that responses to an Ofsted judgment of inadequate can be extremely emotionally damaging for leaders. It was the impact of the responses pre and post inspection rather than the Ofsted inspection itself that participants found most distressing.

A significant strength is that this is the first study that considers the lived experience of senior children's social care leaders that have been subject to a poor inspection outcome. A major strength of the study is the fact that I was able to access these stories by providing a platform to finally give participants a voice. The findings, I submit, would be a valuable consideration in future leadership development, although I acknowledge it would be perversely counterintuitive to suggest that the possibility of failure forms part of management training.

As already mentioned, this is a small-scale study. Initially, I had planned to limit participation to eight tier 1 and 2 leaders – leaders employed as the statutory DCS and operational directors – although this was expanded to tier 3 leaders later in the programme, due to a failure to recruit enough tier 1 and 2 participants. The number of potential leaders was restricted to those in the 19 local authorities that received an inadequate judgement. Despite difficulties in recruitment, the overall recruitment of

participants using convenience sampling captured a diverse range of experiences (Stratton, 2021).

It is also acknowledged that the researcher has direct experience of the research topic (please see Chapter One). There are, I would suggest, benefits to sharing similarities in the lived experience of the research participants when conducting the interviews and data analysis.

I approached the research from a position of a shared experience, insofar as having been a senior manager in a children's service that received an inadequate Ofsted inspection. I also had a shared understanding of language and how both local authorities and senior management teams operate. However, it is acknowledged that when undertaking qualitative research this knowledge and experience may influence the research in terms of the development of the research design, research questions, method of analysis and interpretation of the findings (Robson, 2011).

The researcher was alive to the possibilities of researcher bias and worked with my supervisor to ensure that the overarching and supplementary questions were framed in such a way that minimised bias and were appropriate to the research aims. In addition, the researcher was mindful of the importance of allowing participants to tell their own stories so as not to lead participants.

6.7 Future Research and Changes to the Ofsted Inspection Frameworks

The findings suggest further research that explores how social care organisations prepare for, facilitate and respond to external inspection and validation of the quality of the services they deliver. The research should explore the emotional impact on leaders and how organisations contain the undeniable anxieties that accompany this activity. This research needs to explore how inspections are viewed and responded to within the wider system. Understanding the impact of the annual self-assessment now required as part of the Ofsted inspection process and whether this facilitates measured and proportionate improvement activity would be helpful.

This study only explored the lived experience of senior leaders and future research should be extended to include leaders in less senior but crucial operational roles. The impact of inspection on practitioners, supervisors and front-line leaders needs to be more widely understood so that internal support mechanisms can be adapted to support these staff.

In the past few months, the emotional impact on key players who have been subject to an Ofsted inspection has come to the fore, following the tragic death of head teacher Ruth Perry. Mrs Perry committed suicide in January 2023 while waiting for an Ofsted report to be published. ‘There is a risk of further deaths following the suicide of head teacher Ruth Perry, "unless action is taken", a coroner has told Ofsted and the education secretary’ (Clarke, 2023).

As a result, Ofsted inspections of schools were paused for two weeks to allow inspectors to be trained in mental health awareness. In addition, Ofsted has introduced measures whereby head teachers, academy trusts and local authorities can ask for an inspection to be paused where there are concerns about the mental health impact of those involved. This is a positive step but runs the risk of further pathologising leaders as 'inadequate', thus pushing the emotional impact of inspection further underground. An analysis of the impact of 'paused inspections' must be conducted to examine whether they are truly beneficial for staff at risk of emotional distress.

At this juncture, it is unclear what impact such measures will have on senior leaders both in education and children's social care services. I would suggest that further research of these changes would be extremely valuable in the future.

6.8 Final Reflections

My research journey started at the end of an Osted inspection when the organisation I was employed in was judged to be inadequate. Unbeknown at the time was that this experience would lead to the completion of this thesis.

At the time I commenced my research formally, I was unemployed and still trying to come to terms with my own experience. I did not know what my future career would look like.

The project is deeply personal, based on my own experiences. The need for reflexivity and to position my thoughts using psycho-social theory was crucial so as not

to distort the findings of my study. It would be remiss of me not to say that this academic journey has, at times, opened wounds that I thought were healing.

I was (and probably still am) a novice researcher. I mistakenly assumed that senior leaders who found themselves in similar circumstances would welcome an opportunity to share their experiences, but recruiting sufficient participants was problematic. As a result, my research focus changed from just researching senior leaders who had found themselves displaced following a poor Ofsted outcome. I extended the possible participant cohort to include those senior leaders that remain in post. Upon reflection, I think this has added to the richness of the data.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust
&
The University of Essex
Professional Doctorate in Advanced Practice & Research (Social Work & Social Care)

Information for Research Participants

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:
Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

The Researcher
Ian Leadbetter
c/o The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
The Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Research Supervisor
Dr David Forbes

Course Director
Professor Andrew Cooper

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
The Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Telephone: 020 7435 7111

Background of the Researcher

I qualified as a social worker in 1991 and was employed as a social worker, team manager and head of service in children's services until February 2017. Following a career break, in January 2018 I started work as a team, and more latterly as a service manager in a local authority children's social care department.

In addition to my social work qualification, I hold an MA in social work awarded by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust in collaboration with the University of East London.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this document is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study. Please feel free to ask for further clarification if there are any areas that you would like more detail about.

Withdrawal of Consent

If you agree to take part in this research, you may withdraw your consent at any time up to the point of the commencement of data analysis, which you will be notified of, and without the need to give a reason. Any data collected will be securely destroyed and no information provided will be included in the research.

Project Title

After Ofsted: How managers in children's social care recover emotionally and professionally from a poor inspection outcome.

Project Description

The overall aim of the research is to understand the emotions that managers have experienced when faced with a poor Ofsted outcome, from a psychological perspective, and to explore their emotional and professional recovery.

For the purposes of this research, I wish to identify senior managers (directors and assistant directors) who were in post at the time when Ofsted judged their children's social care services to be inadequate. In addition to managers that remained in post, I am also keen to include participants that decided for themselves that they should resign from their post and those where this decision was taken by others. It is the emotional and professional impact of the individual journey of recovery that I wish to explore.

Project Design

My plan is to undertake a qualitative piece of research using interviews to capture the lived experience of up to eight senior managers.

The requirement would be for each participant to take part in up to two interviews lasting no more than one and a half hours each. There will be a gap after the first interview of approximately two weeks to allow for a period of reflection for both you and me, which may lead to a second interview.

As a participant you will be asked to tell your own story, at your own pace, and with the freedom to say what is important to you.

I will record this interview and will then transcribe what you have said. I will offer you a copy of your interview for comment.

Once all the data has been collected it will be analysed and the findings will be written up into a thesis to be submitted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Advanced Practice & Research (Social Work & Social Care) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Essex.

Possible Advantages of Taking Part

Recovery will have a different meaning to each participant. The interviews may provide a therapeutic opportunity for some, a reflective space for others or a combination of both, irrespective of where you are on your recovery journey.

Overall, this is a retrospective study insomuch as I am seeking information about the participants' lived experience. Therefore, the study will have no direct impact on the events that have already taken place but may, perhaps for the first time, provide a safe space for reflection.

Possible Disadvantages and Risks of Taking Part

Whilst I would hope you will find the interviews interesting, there is a risk that you might find them distressing and anxiety provoking.

After the interview there will be an opportunity to debrief and to offer you further support, should you find this helpful. This may include suggesting that you contact your GP to signpost you for further support.

If you appear distressed during the interview, you or I may end the interview early without any pressure to continue.

Confidentiality of the Data

No information that would lead to your identification will be disclosed as part of this research. This will include name, gender, job title, actual or regional location. Any information about a third party will be redacted or obscured to prevent your identity from becoming known. Whilst every effort will be taken to protect your identity using the methods highlighted, total anonymity cannot be absolutely guaranteed.

If you agree to participate in the research, it will be at your own risk.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Both the recordings and transcribed notes will be kept securely, and once the thesis has been submitted, they will be destroyed.

On completion, my research will be publicly available and may be used or cited in further research or academic journals.

Important Consideration

I am conscious that some participants may have entered into a settlement agreement with their previous employer as part of severance arrangements. Most agreements also contain a confidentiality clause that may make taking part in this research difficult if your identity became known. Every effort will be taken to ensure that this research does not lead to your identity being disclosed. If you wish to participate you will need to ensure that you can do so without breaching your agreement. I am happy to discuss this further with you.

Location

Because of the current restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to comply with social distancing guidelines, the interviews will be undertaken using Zoom or MS Teams video conferencing technology.

I will be responsible for setting up and sending you the necessary links to participate in the interviews. To take part you will need access to a suitable computer with a camera and either speakers or a headphone connection so we can see and hear each other.

Remuneration

Participation in this research does not attract any financial reward.

This project has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

&

The University of Essex

Professional Doctorate in Advanced Practice & Research (Social Work & Social Care)

CONSENT FORM

Research Study: After Ofsted: How managers in children's social care recover emotionally and professionally from a poor inspection outcome.

Researcher: Ian Leadbetter

Research Supervisor: Dr David Forbes

Please read the information points below. Please confirm that you understand each point by placing a √ in the ☐. If you require any additional information on any point please ask.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign the consent form.

Participation

☐ I, the undersigned, voluntarily agree to take part in the research entitled 'After Ofsted: How managers in children's social care recover emotionally and professionally from a poor inspection outcome'.

☐ I confirm that I have fully considered any specific confidentiality clause in any agreement that I have entered with my previous employer. Participation will be at my own risk.

Research Information

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the research and what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the research and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

Your Personal Data

☐ I understand that all the personal information that will be obtained through this research will only ever be used for the purposes of this research, and that the researcher promises to:

- Ask only for the information he needs
- Make sure my information is safe and that no unauthorised person has access to it
- Give me the chance to change my personal information if I believe it is wrong
- Ensure that all my data is held and processed in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR 2016

☐ I consent to the interview being audio-recorded, and to the recording being transcribed tor the purpose of this research.

☐ I confirm that I understand that should I disclose anything that would give cause for concern about my personal safety, the researcher would be under an obligation to disclose this to ensure that I receive the appropriate help and assistance.

☐ **I understand that the research upon completion will be published in full and that it may be used or cited in future research or academic journals.**

Right to Withdraw

☐ I understand that taking part in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw from the research at any time up to the commencement of the data analysis (which I will be notified of). Should I withdraw I understand that any material that I have provided as part of the research will be securely destroyed and no part of the material used in any way.

Consent

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information in this form and freely consent to participate in this research.

☐ I have been given adequate time to consider my participation.

☐ I understand that this is a small-scale study and every effort will be made to ensure my identity is not disclosed. In addition, I accept that total anonymity cannot be guaranteed and participation in the research will be at my own risk.

☐ I understand that the research is being carried out as part of a professional doctorate.

Signatures
Name of research participant:
Signed:
Date:

Name of researcher: Ian Leadbetter

Signed: 
Date: October 2020

Researcher Contact Details
c/o The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
The Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

APPENDIX C: TREC (ETHICS) APPROVAL

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 8938 2699
https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk

Ian Leadbetter

By Email

23 July 2020

Dear Ian,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: After Ofsted: How managers in children's social care recover emotionally and professionally from a poor inspection outcome.

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Best regards,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk