

Joint area review

Wolverhampton Children's Services Authority Area

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
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Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Wolverhampton area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.
4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:
 - self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
 - a survey of children and young people
 - performance data
 - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
 - evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection
 - briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.
6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood in Dovecotes. It also included gathering evidence on nine key judgements, selected because of their critical importance

to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users, and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Wolverhampton is a culturally diverse city in the West Midlands. It has a population of around 239,000 people, of whom almost a quarter are of black and minority ethnic heritage. The largest black and minority ethnic group is Indian but there is also a significant African Caribbean community. There are considerable variations between neighbourhoods: some are relatively affluent, but 27% are in the top 10% of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Health inequalities between neighbourhoods persist.

8. Over the past 20 years, the manufacturing base of the city has declined and employment levels have fallen. Unemployment now stands at 4.8%, well above the national average of 2.3%. Wages are comparatively low. Around 40% of the over-16 population have no qualifications. Developing a trained and skilled workforce to meet the needs of the emerging new industries is a key priority.

9. Almost a quarter of all dependent children live in households where no-one is working. The rate of growth of the black and minority ethnic population is greatest amongst children and young people; 31% of Wolverhampton's under-19 population are of black and minority ethnic heritage. Crime and anti-social behaviour are reducing.

10. The city is Labour controlled, and a leader and cabinet manage its strategic direction. The Wolverhampton Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has sound governance arrangements and good representation and participation from all the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies. A Director for Children and Young People heads a single children and young people's service. A Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is in place. The area is served by West Midlands police. A number of voluntary and private agencies deliver a range of commissioned services across the city.

11. Primary care and mental health services for children in Wolverhampton are provided by the Wolverhampton City Primary Care Trust (PCT). The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust is the main provider of acute children's services. The West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust provides the ambulance service for Wolverhampton and the surrounding area. These trusts fall within the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority.

12. There are 235 registered childminders and 33 non-maintained early years education providers. There are seven nursery schools, eight infant schools, seven junior schools, 65 primary schools, seven special schools, four pupil

referral units and 18 secondary schools all of which have sixth-form provision. There are 25 resource bases supporting children with additional needs, including language and communication difficulties, physical health problems, learning difficulties and/or disabilities, hearing impairment and visual impairment and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. At the time of the joint area review, 379 children were looked after, most of whom live in family placements. Children's social care services are delivered through locality based teams and family centres. There is a central duty and referral system and dedicated teams for looked after children.

13. The Black Country Learning and Skills Council is in partnership with the local authority, Connexions, Wolverhampton City College, 18 secondary schools and nine training providers in addressing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by Wolverhampton City College, all 18 secondary schools and the nine training providers. The college and three other training organisations provide training for employment through the Entry to Employment programme, providing a total of 359 places. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by Wolverhampton City College, the council's adult education service and through children's centres and extended schools provision.

14. There are two youth offender institutions serving the area.

Summary Report

Outcomes for children and young people

15. **Outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton are generally adequate. Health outcomes are good, and they are outstanding with regard to enabling children and young people make a positive contribution to society.** Most children and young people appear to be safe.

16. Children and young people are generally healthy. The perinatal mortality rate has improved significantly, levels of obesity have reduced, immunisation rates are in line with national and regional averages, and oral health is good. However, the teenage conception rate remains high and above the national average. Access to support for those with mental health difficulties is good. Most children feel safe in school and in their local area. Child protection concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately and all those on the child protection register and all looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers. Initial assessments of all new referrals are allocated and completed in a timely way but not all are sufficiently thorough. Overall, children and young people achieve adequately in school. Achievement of young children in early years education settings is very good, with standards exceeding similar authorities. Children in primary schools make satisfactory progress and educational outcomes for children aged 11 are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Achievement for children aged 11 and 14 is in line with similar

authorities but below the national average: standards of achievement overall are in line with similar authorities. The percentage of children achieving at least five A*–C grades at GCSE or equivalent is in line with the national average and above similar authorities. However, achievement in these examinations in mathematics and English is significantly lower than the national average. Pupils from black and minority ethnic heritage make generally satisfactory progress and some, including those of Black African heritage, have made significantly improved progress year on year. Permanent exclusions are half the rate found elsewhere. Attendance has improved and is now in line with both similar authorities and the position seen nationally.

17. Children and young people have an outstanding range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility. They contribute well to service development and their views make a difference. Most make a good contribution to their schools and communities through youth councils. Anti-social behaviour and rates of re-offending are reducing, and national and local targets have been met. Children and young people are prepared well for working life in many aspects but outcomes for economic well-being are adequate. Attainment levels are generally adequate and have improved overall. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. Participation rates in post-16 education are high and progression to higher education is improving. However, the overall number of young people aged 16 to 19 who are not in employment or training remains stubbornly high at 10.8%, which is significantly higher than the national average.

The impact of local services

18. **The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is good overall.** Health services are good, and strong partnership working across agencies is improving the health of children and young people. Services are well-coordinated and targeted to address health inequalities. Support for parents is good. Healthy lifestyles are well promoted, with good involvement by schools. However, work on reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies is not sufficiently integrated across services and is failing to impact on the high rate of teenage conceptions. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are effective. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good, well-coordinated services from partner agencies.

19. The children and families' social care service is adequate. Children's services have been re-focused effectively towards prevention of harm and family breakdown. A wide range of preventative family support services is available and well used, helping to reduce the numbers of children on the child protection register and those looked after by the council. Child protection processes and practice are satisfactory, concerns are dealt with promptly, and all cases are allocated. However, poor performance in some casework practice is not consistently identified and addressed, although quality assurance and audit processes have been strengthened to improve this. Thresholds for referrals of concerns are clear and generally well understood across agencies.

Collaboration between partner agencies at strategic level and in working with individual children is good. Serious case reviews are undertaken appropriately but there were delays in implementing recommendations arising from the last review undertaken. Council guidance on safe recruitment is clear and appropriate, but it is not consistently implemented, although immediate steps to address this have been taken. Looked after children and most care leavers are well supported.

20. Support for children to enjoy and achieve is good. Good quality, accessible early years and day care provision is in place and there are increasing numbers of well-integrated children's centres. Monitoring, challenge and support for schools are generally good. Effective local authority support for the management of behaviour and attendance in schools has brought attendance in line with similar authorities and the national average, and permanent exclusions are very low at half the rate seen elsewhere.

21. The impact of all services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Services promote children's and young people's personal, emotional and social development very well. The council and its partners demonstrate a very strong commitment to consulting with, and listening to, children and young people, including those from hard to reach groups, enabling them to make a valued contribution. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Young people aged 11 to 19 are helped to prepare for working life very well in many aspects. The curriculum enables the development of skills that enhance employability prospects. Careers education and guidance are good and enable young people to make informed choices. Education and training for 14 to 19 years olds is planned and co-ordinated effectively. However, access to some Entry to Employment courses is difficult and places on pre-Entry to Employment courses are limited. Partnership working with most key stakeholders is very good. However, the engagement of employers is at an early stage and the availability of work-based learning apprenticeships is insufficient to meet demand. There is insufficient appropriate housing to meet demand.

Being healthy

22. **The impact of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Agencies are working well together to improve the health of children and young people by targeting health inequalities across the city. Support for parents is good. Parenting skills are well promoted by a range of agencies in a variety of settings, with children's centres playing an increasingly pivotal role. Targeted antenatal services are good. Immunisation uptake is well promoted. An effective multi-agency approach to health promotion is in place; a high percentage of schools are engaged with the Healthy Schools programme and good partnership work has contributed to the uptake of physical activity in schools. Work on reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies is not sufficiently integrated across services and is failing to impact

on the high rate of teenage conceptions. Peer educators make an effective contribution to the well-integrated approach taken to reducing substance misuse. CAMHS provision is good: effective leadership and direction has resulted in a good, integrated service, with improvements to the timeliness and support available for children and young people with mental health needs. There are limited age-appropriate in-patient facilities for 16 to 18 year olds admitted to hospital. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good, well-coordinated services from partner agencies, facilitated by the co-location of services for children with complex needs on one new purpose-built site in the city.

Staying safe

23. **The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Children and families' services have been re-focused effectively towards prevention of harm and family breakdown. This strengthening of family support services has contributed to a reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and of those who are looked after by the council. Thresholds for referral to children and families' services are clear and appropriate and generally well understood by other agencies. Child protection processes and practice for children most at risk are satisfactory and concerns are dealt with promptly. Inter-agency work is generally good. The duty and referral service has been effectively reorganised and the new structure ensures that all new initial assessments are completed in a timely way. However, the quality of some assessments is not sufficiently thorough and some individual poor performance is not consistently identified and addressed. In a small number of cases this has led to some poor practice. Quality assurance and audit processes have recently been strengthened to address this.

24. Domestic violence is recognised as a priority area; high and increasing numbers of incidents are identified by partner agencies each month. Work has begun to ensure the multi-agency risk assessment conference process is used effectively to ensure responses to all children in need referrals are timely and consistent. Council guidance on safe recruitment is clear and appropriate but is not consistently implemented. Immediate action has been taken to address this. Collaboration between partner agencies is good and a wide range, including voluntary sector agencies, is represented on the LSCB. Serious case reviews are undertaken appropriately but there were delays in implementing recommendations arising from one of these. Support for looked after children and young people and most care leavers is generally good. A sound, integrated placement strategy is beginning to improve the range of placements for looked after children. Work with children with disabilities is good, with a range of specialist provision available.

Enjoying and achieving

25. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Sufficient and accessible early years education and day care provision is available and its quality is higher than is the case nationally. Good progress is being made in opening a network of children's centres across the area and services in them are well integrated. Monitoring, challenge and support for schools are generally good and until recently had resulted in far fewer schools being in an Ofsted category than is the case nationally. However, the percentage of such schools is now in line with the national average. Curriculum support is strong. The achievements of children are satisfactory; the authority did not reach its 2006 Local Public Service Agreement target for pupils aged 11. However, the achievements of these pupils have been rising for several years and young people make satisfactory progress from the age of 7. Students aged 16 achieve highly, due in part to effective use of vocational qualifications. The gap between that level of performance, however, and achievements in mathematics and English is too large. Support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, with delegation to area panels contributing to a reduction in the number of new statements being issued. Effective local authority support for the management of behaviour and attendance in schools has led to improvements in both. While there is suitable provision for young people not attending school, there are unacceptable delays in arranging provision for some young people who are permanently excluded. Looked after children are well supported in their education and show improved achievement. There is a very good range of recreational and voluntary learning opportunities across the area.

Making a positive contribution

26. **The impact of all services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding.** Services promote children's and young people's personal, emotional and social development very well. Young people are extremely well supported to develop their understanding of citizenship and decision making through their involvement in school councils and the development of local initiatives. The council and its partners demonstrate a very strong commitment to consulting with, and listening to, children and young people, including those from hard to reach groups, enabling many to make a valued contribution. Good arrangements are in place to consult with looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Excellent support and advice is available to children and young people managing change and experiencing difficulties in their lives. Vulnerable children and young people are very well supported. Councillors and senior officers demonstrate a strong commitment to corporate parenting. Roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. Children and young people who are looked after receive good support from a range of services and most are fully involved when key decisions are made about their lives. A good range of respite services supports children and young people with learning difficulties

or disabilities well. Preventative programmes are effective in reducing anti-social behaviour. The Youth Offending Team is very successful in engaging with other partners to deliver a wide range of diversionary programmes that engages those at risk of offending.

Achieving economic well-being

27. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Young people aged 11 to 19 are helped to prepare well for working life in many aspects. The children's information service is well used and provides good information, advice and support. The council and its partners work together very effectively to provide a broad and well-coordinated curriculum for young people. Extensive opportunities exist for vocational study at Key Stage 4 and the curriculum enables the development of skills that enhance employability prospects. Careers education and individual information advice and guidance are good and enable young people to make informed choices. Good personal, financial and welfare support is available post-16 and academic progress is effectively monitored. Education and training for 14 to 19 year olds is planned and coordinated effectively. Partnership working with most key stakeholders is very good but the engagement of employers is at an early stage. The availability of work-based learning apprenticeships is insufficient to meet demand. Access for young people to some Entry to Employment courses is difficult and places on pre-Entry to Employment courses are limited. These gaps have a significant impact on helping young people achieve economic well-being. Community regeneration initiatives are targeted at the most needy areas and community involvement in consultation is good. However these have yet to impact on reducing unemployment. Appropriate advice, guidance and support are provided to young people requiring housing, although the availability and suitability of some housing is insufficient. Care leavers are generally well supported but there is insufficient capacity to fully meet the needs of those requiring higher levels of support. Transition arrangements are effective for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good personal and welfare support are provided. However, there are limited opportunities of employment for these young people.

Service management

28. The management of services for children and young people is good. Leadership by councillors and senior management is visible and effective. Partnership working across all agencies and at all levels is strong and well established. Partners recognise that key issues relating to children and young people, such as improving attainment and aspirations, have an important influence on the realisation of their broader ambitions for the regeneration of Wolverhampton. Effective consultation with children and young people played an important part in developing the Children and Young People's Plan and the wider Vision 2020 for Wolverhampton. Strong improvement plans exist for key priorities and areas of underperformance. Resources are well matched to

priorities but most plans are not explicit about resourcing. The area provides appropriately for the needs of diverse communities, both in mainstream provision and through a range of initiatives. There are many good examples of integrated service delivery and partnership at local level is strong.

29. Performance monitoring is strong and thorough. Scrutiny provides strong, constructive challenge and scrutiny reviews contribute significantly to improvement. The nature and range of involvement of children and young people in evaluating services is outstanding. However, service standards for service users are not published. There are good examples of action that is securing better value for money but a systematic approach to it is only in the early stages of development. There are deficiencies in some aspects of human resources, which contribute to inconsistencies in the quality of practice in children's social care. Capacity to improve further is good. There is evidence of improvement in a number of areas, such as good leadership, strong partnership working and excellent engagement by children and young people. The partnership's self-assessment demonstrates good self-awareness in most areas. This review agrees with its judgement in two outcome areas, being healthy and enjoying and achieving, but judged making a positive contribution as outstanding and staying safe and achieving economic well-being as adequate.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	3		
Staying safe	2		
Enjoying and achieving	3		
Making a positive contribution	4		
Achieving economic well-being	2		
Service management	3		
Capacity to improve	3	3	
Children's services		3	
The education service		3	
The social care services for children		2	
The health service for children			3

Recommendations

For immediate action

- Ensure that safe recruitment systems are in place, and adhered to, by all services working with children and young people.

- Improve systems and processes to ensure the quality and consistency of practice in children and families' services.
- Ensure that learning from all future serious case reviews is firmly embedded in practice without delay.
- Ensure that timely and appropriate full-time provision is made for every permanently excluded pupil.

For action over the next six months

- Ensure that all plans are explicit about resource implications.
- Prepare service standards for key services in consultation with service users, and make these available to all service users.
- Implement an integrated city-wide strategy to ensure a sustained reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancies.
- Raise the achievement of young people aged 16 years in mathematics and English.
- Engage employers in the 14–19 curriculum strategy to improve the provision of work-based learning opportunities post-16 and the progression of young people into permanent employment.
- Improve the range, suitability and availability of housing for young people.

For action in the longer term

- Provide age-appropriate in-patient facilities for all 16 to 18 year olds admitted to hospital.
- Undertake value for money benchmarking on a systematic basis.

Main Report

Outcomes for children and young people

30. **Outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton are generally adequate. They are good in health and outstanding with regards to enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution to society. Most children and young people appear safe.**

31. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** Infant mortality rates remain slightly above the national average but rates are improving, with a significant reduction in the perinatal mortality rate. There are also improvements in the numbers of mothers choosing to breastfeed and a reduction in the numbers of expectant mothers who smoke during pregnancy.

Immunisation rates at the ages of two and five are in line with regional and national averages; the incidence of measles in children aged under one is lower than the national average, but in those aged under 15 the figure is higher. The oral health of children and young people is good, with the number of decayed, missing or filled teeth below the national average. The percentage of children aged 11 to 12 classed as overweight has dropped from 40% to 30%. The incidence of Chlamydia amongst the 16 to 19 age group is below the national average and has shown a downward trend since 2003. However, the teenage conception rate remains significantly higher than the national average. The percentage of children and young people undertaking over two hours of physical activity a week is above the national average. The incidence of admission to hospital for drug-related disorders is below the national average. The timeliness of action and the support offered to children and young people with mental health needs have improved and access is good. The number of looked after children receiving annual health assessments is lower than comparator authorities and the national average. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good, well-coordinated services.

32. **Most children and young people appear safe** and most feel safe in school and in their local area. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has reduced. The number of children on the child protection register has reduced significantly due to improved preventative work, with families and children benefiting from a wide range of good support. Child protection concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. All child protection cases and all looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers. The reviews for these two groups are held on time. However, the number of children re-registered on the register is high and, at the end of March 2006, was above comparator authorities and the national average. The timeliness of completing initial assessments is well below comparator authorities: however, this is improving rapidly and new initial assessments are being completed promptly. Most core assessments are completed within timescales. However, the quality of assessments is variable; not all are sufficiently thorough and focused on improving outcomes. Poor performance is not consistently identified and addressed and, in a small number of cases, this has led to some poor practice. Good systems and services prevent children becoming looked after unnecessarily. Looked after children are generally well supported: most live in stable family placements with foster carers and growing numbers are placed for adoption. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parent/carers receive good support.

33. **Children and young people generally achieve adequately and reach adequate levels of attainment.** Standards in the Foundation Stage are very good and exceed those in similar authorities. At the ages of both seven and 11, children's achievements are in line with similar authorities, although below the level seen nationally. Educational outcomes for children aged 11 are improving at a faster rate than nationally, with children in primary schools making satisfactory progress. Children's progress between the ages of 11 and 14 is at a rate marginally below that seen nationally. Results in national tests

for pupils aged 14 have been improving and in English and science are in line with those found in similar authorities but below national averages. At the age of 16, the percentage of children achieving at least five A*–C grades at GCSE or equivalent is in line with the national average and above that for similar authorities. This good performance is due, largely, to effective use of vocational qualifications. However, the percentage of students achieving at least five A*–C grades including mathematics and English is around 20 percentage points lower than the overall figure, and the gap between these two measures of performance far exceeds that found nationally. Pupils from black and minority ethnic heritage make generally satisfactory progress; however, this is not totally consistent. While some, including those of Black African heritage, have made significantly improved progress year on year, some pupils of Pakistani heritage did not make the progress expected at key stage 4 in 2006. Permanent exclusions are very low, at about half the rate seen elsewhere. Attendance, overall, has improved and is in line with both similar authorities and the position seen nationally. Some 70% of looked after young people either equalled or exceeded their personal targets for five or more GCSEs at grades A*–G and results generally for this group of young people have risen in recent years. Results are above similar authorities and the national average but remain below the rate achieved by all pupils.

34. Children and young people have an outstanding range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility.

Children and young people are involved in a wide range of activities resulting in the development of good personal and social skills. Many make an excellent contribution to school councils, and young people actively participate in the Youth Council and other major initiatives such as Youth Banks, which decides on funding for new youth projects. Many children and young people have excellent opportunities to contribute to their communities through the work of the youth and play service. Local provision of services meets the needs of children and young people extremely well, with many opportunities for children and young people to contribute to service development. Their views make a difference. Parents attending parenting and adult learning classes are positive about the outcomes that these classes have for themselves and their children. Vulnerable children and young people, including those who are looked after, respond well to opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect them. A very extensive range of methods is used to communicate with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ensuring that their views make a difference. A well-established programme of early intervention is successful in reducing anti-social behaviour across the authority and in identified localities. There is a sustained reduction in re-offending rates and a reduction in the numbers of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system.

35. Children and young people are prepared well for working life but outcomes for achieving economic well-being are adequate. The 14–16 curriculum is particularly well developed and includes an extensive vocational offer. Attainment levels have improved overall, although attainment levels in English and mathematics are too low. Educational standards post-16 are

satisfactory overall and are improving in most areas. However, despite continued improvement, average point scores for students entered for A and AS level examinations remain below average.

36. During years 10 and 11, the vast majority of pupils experience the world of work. Young people are well supported in making the transition between different stages of their learning. Participation rates in post-16 education are high and progression to higher education is improving. However, the availability of work-based learning apprenticeships is insufficient to meet demand. Access to some Entry to Employment courses is difficult and places on pre-Entry to Employment courses are limited. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support and achieve well. However, there are limited opportunities for employment. Levels of participation in education, employment or training for looked after children are high but too few enter higher education. Overall, the number of young people aged 16 to 19 who are not in education, employment or training remains stubbornly high at 10.8%, significantly higher than the national average. The overall availability and suitability of accommodation for young people, including those who are most vulnerable, especially move-on and emergency accommodation, is insufficient.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

37. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Work is well targeted at reducing health inequalities within the city. Midwives provide good antenatal care to vulnerable groups, contributing to reducing the infant and perinatal mortality rates. Parenting skills are well promoted by a range of agencies, with the children's centres playing an increasingly pivotal role. As a consequence of this good work, the number of women who smoke during pregnancy is decreasing and the proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding is rising. Initiatives involving the council and local business are also providing support and facilities to mothers who wish to breastfeed. Children's dental care is good, with sufficient dental care available. Health visitors are working well to increase the uptake of child health surveillance activities across the city. A high percentage of children have first contact with health visitors, and hard-to-reach groups such as homeless families and young parents are well targeted.

38. Healthy lifestyles for children and young people are promoted well across the city: the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Strategy is well established and a high percentage of schools are engaged in the Healthy Schools programme. Wolverhampton has an effective School Sports Coordinator programme in place and innovative projects, such as the PE and School Sport Network partnerships, have contributed to the development and uptake of physical activity. School nurses offer good guidance and support to parents participating in the Swim to Health programme, which is run by a local

voluntary organisation to encourage children and young people to swim after school and in the holidays.

39. The good multi-agency approach to health promotion includes targeted work in schools on smoking cessation, sex and relationships education and the misuse of drugs. The effective delivery of the sex and relationships education programme has contributed to a sustained reduction in the rate of under-16s contracting a sexually transmitted disease. However, work on reducing teenage pregnancies is not sufficiently integrated across services and is failing to have a positive impact on a rate of teenage conceptions that remains significantly higher than the national average. Some young people do not feel comfortable using the contraception and sexual health clinics, and only 25% of attendances at these clinics are by young people under 20. A growing number of young people choose to use the good, open-access contraceptive services at Base 25, a well-used and accessible support centre for young people.

40. The Substance Misuse Team has developed effective and innovative partnership working programmes, particularly through services delivered at Base 25, and there is an active programme of training young people as peer educators for substance safety awareness. Good substance safety awareness programmes are delivered to children and young people in both primary and secondary schools and the programmes are also run for young people in non-school locations.

41. Access to accident and emergency services is good, with dedicated facilities for children and young people; the provision of children's nurses has improved with the re-location of a specialist service to the main hospital site. The hospital-based youth workers are a good example of partnership working between the Royal Wolverhampton Hospital Trust and the youth and play service. The team has helped develop better understanding of the support needs of children and young people with physical and mental health needs in both hospital and community settings. However, there is a shortage of dedicated in-patient bed space for adolescents in the children's unit.

42. CAMHS provision is good and integrated well, and effective leadership and direction from the joint management group has helped to drive developments to this service. The integrated, multi-agency approach provided by CAMHS has led to improvements in the timeliness and support offered to children and young people with mental health needs; the tiered service approach has adopted a successful 'no waiting list' policy. The emotional needs of children and young people are well addressed through schools' programmes of sex and relationships education and the school nursing service. Effective transitional arrangements are in place with the adult mental health services. Comprehensive CAMHS provision is provided to the Youth Offending Team, and the policy of early and intense interventions by CAMHS has helped to alleviate the need for more specialist Tier 4 care. Good input from the designated health staff in the Youth Offending Team has helped to develop the service and introduce a successful universal health screening pilot.

43. There is a designated doctor and nurse to support the health needs of looked after children, but resources are not sufficient to ensure that initial and review medical assessments are carried out in a timely way. Systems to ensure that health screenings are undertaken are not robust and not all social workers are sufficiently pro-active in motivating some children to participate in the screening. These shortcomings have been recognised and steps to address these problems have already been agreed. Within residential children's homes, information and guidance for children and young people about primary health services and healthy living choices is good, but this is not systematically available for children in foster care. Access to CAMHS is good for children living in Wolverhampton but can be more difficult for those placed at a long distance outside the authority.

44. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good, well-coordinated care facilitated by the co-location of services for children with complex needs at the Gem Centre, a new purpose-built site. The Gem Centre provides a single point of access to a wide range of services, including community paediatrics, specialist children's nurses, CAMHS, hearing services, school nurses, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and the social care team for young people with disabilities.

45. The development of the family focused Team Around the Child is now well embedded in service delivery for families of children under five years of age with complex needs. Children's health and educational services work well together in both mainstream and special settings across the city and there is dedicated input from the CAMHS team. A well-established, integrated strategy ensures effective transition for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moving over from children's to adult services.

Staying safe

46. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** The range of safety information, advice and support to parents and children is good. Family and children's centres undertake appropriate, and in some cases creative, keep-safe work with children, including that of 'stranger danger'. Road safety awareness teams, including police officers and fire officers, undertake effective preventative work in schools. The majority of children and young people report feeling safe and describe good work taking place to promote safety and good behaviour in local areas.

47. The prevention of bullying, including racism, is taken seriously and children and young people report positively on how bullying is tackled in schools. Packages of support available through the Freedom programme effectively support children who have witnessed or are subjected to violence and abuse. The impact of domestic violence is well understood across agencies and there are satisfactory protocols in place for joint working with relevant agencies such as the police. Processes for multi-agency risk assessment

conferences have been developed and are utilised well. However, increased awareness of domestic violence has resulted in high numbers of referrals to children's services and there is a lack of clarity in the relationship between the conference process and the duty system in responding to children in need concerns to ensure these are always timely and consistent. Further work is being undertaken with partner agencies to address this. A wide range of good family support and prevention services is available for children and families, including support to deal with the trauma of sexual abuse. Family centres and other self-help groups are well supported by CAMHS.

48. The LSCB has been established within the required timescale. It has good involvement from all agencies, including the voluntary sector, and its work is underpinned by appropriate policies and procedures. However, as its work is at an early stage of development, it is too early for it to be fully embedded into the organisational culture of the area. The council's guidance on safe recruiting is clear and appropriate. However, it is not consistently implemented to ensure safe recruitment of all of the staff working with children. There is evidence of staff in some services starting work prior to criminal record bureau checks and references being received. Immediate steps have been taken to address this and the LCSB is reviewing practice in this area. Serious case reviews are undertaken appropriately but the authority's response to these has not always been timely and dissemination of recommendations emanating from the last review has been slow. Multi-agency public protection arrangements are in place and are well implemented.

49. Guidance on thresholds for referrals of concerns to the children and families' service is clear and appropriate and generally well understood by staff from other agencies. An effective reconfiguration of the duty service has resulted in a more focused response to referrals and has improved the timeliness of initial assessments. Duty processes are satisfactory and all work is allocated. New initial assessments are undertaken promptly. However, the quality of initial assessments is variable and the focus on throughput of cases sometimes results in assessments not being sufficiently thorough. Accuracy and timeliness of inputting data into the computer system presents challenges to some teams. Most core assessments are completed within required timescales. Inter-agency working with individual children is generally good but records do not always reflect this accurately. High levels of agency staff in some teams affect the consistency of work with some children. Managers are available and supportive and offer regular supervision appreciated by staff.

50. Clear and effective partnership working is evident in the authority. Some shared working facilities for professionals from different disciplines help to facilitate a high degree of multi-agency working. A wide range of preventative family support services is well used and has contributed to a significant reduction in the numbers of children on the child protection register. Family support plans are well monitored and adjusted to meet identified needs. The Common Assessment Framework is beginning to be rolled out, with generally good inter-agency involvement, but it is too early to assess its impact.

51. Child protection arrangements for those children most at risk are satisfactory. Where child protection issues are identified, they are dealt with promptly and appropriately, with visits conducted jointly with the police when necessary. Good collaborative working across agencies is evident in working with children on the child protection register; however, this is not always sufficiently focused on improving outcomes. Some individual poor performance has not been consistently identified and addressed, and in a small number of cases this has led to some poor practice. Quality assurance and audit processes and systems have recently been strengthened to address this. Re-registrations on the child protection register are higher than comparators; the reasons for this are being investigated by the council.

52. Good multi-agency systems for tracking the whereabouts and establishing the identity of children and young people are in place, involving health services as well as children's and young people's services. Protocols for children missing from education are in place and are used well.

53. There is a robust system for ensuring that services are offered to children and families to avoid children becoming looked after. This includes good use of individual and group work at family centres and children's centres and by the Family Advice and Support Team to support families under stress. Most looked after children live in stable family placements and are well supported by qualified social workers. Foster carers enjoy their work and feel well supported. The Foster Care Centre, a 24/7 advice line, and direct access to the Corporate Parenting Panel are excellent examples of integrated support for carers. However, there are too few suitable local placements for looked after children, particularly for those with complex needs. A sound, integrated placement strategy is beginning to address these issues and to increase the range of local provision. This includes the redesign of children's residential homes to offer more flexible provision. A small children's home in Wales offers very good provision to children who need intensive intervention away from the city to keep them safe. Decisions on identifying appropriate placements for looked after children are informed by a strong child-centred focus. There are delays in making permanency plans in some cases, leading to delays in placing some children for adoption. Some looked after children remain too long on care orders after being returned home to their parents' care. Plans are in place to address this.

54. Good collaborative work undertaken between locality teams, the Children with Disabilities Team and partner agencies ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Parents report positively on the services they receive. Up to 90% of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a transition plan to support their transfer from children's to adult services. Reviews for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are held regularly, including those having respite care, and various communication media are used well to involve them in their reviews. The voluntary group Include Me 2, supported by the council, is used positively to consult with carers from black and minority ethnic groups.

Enjoying and achieving

55. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** The provision of early years education and care is excellent. Effective partnership working between the public, private and voluntary sectors has secured a sufficient supply of education and childcare places, with good local access and with potentially disadvantaged groups of children well targeted. Inspection judgements indicate that the quality of early years services is better than the national picture. The quality of teaching in funded nursery education is also above national averages, with no inadequate judgements made by inspectors. Monitoring and support from the local authority are effective and appreciated, as is the good training support provided. Good progress has also been made in opening a network of children's centres across the area, in which services are well integrated. Choices of location for these centres are well informed by health and social needs data.

56. Monitoring, challenge and support for schools are generally good and until recently had resulted in far fewer schools being in an Ofsted category than is the case nationally. However, despite this positive work, the number of schools falling into an Ofsted category of concern has risen recently, with two schools requiring special measures, and the percentage of such schools is now in line with the national average. A distinctive characteristic of this work is a very strong sense of partnership with schools. The Record of School Effectiveness is a thorough and valued way of communicating to schools an authority view of how each school is addressing the five outcomes in Every Child Matters and helps to inform their own self-evaluation. Schools are, generally, appropriately challenged on the basis of the Record and this has, in many cases, secured necessary improvements without any weakening of the professional relationship between schools and the authority. Virtually all services are strongly appreciated by schools, as indicated in their very supportive responses to the Audit Commission survey.

57. Good curriculum support is valued by schools and the authority is active in brokering external support where appropriate. There are some quite outstanding examples of the use of modern technology to promote learning, such as Learn2Go pilot and the 'virtual workspace' for all young people aged 14 to 19. The achievements of students are well monitored. The progress of pupils of black and minority ethnic heritage is generally satisfactory. There are some good examples of projects to raise their attainment, such as the Black Pupils Achievement programme. However, this is variable, with some pupils of Pakistani heritage not making the progress expected at key stage 4 in 2006. The authority did not reach its Local Public Service Agreement target for the achievement of children aged 11, although the achievements of these pupils have been rising for several years. Pupils, generally, make satisfactory progress between the ages of seven and 11. Students achieve highly at the age of 16, with effective use made of vocational qualifications. However, the gap between

this overall success and the achievements of this age group in mathematics and English is high.

58. Plans for implementing the Building Schools for the Future programme are at an early stage. Some good work is being done on the Extended Schools initiative, with some 40% of schools already delivering the core offer. The council has taken appropriate action to remove surplus places in the primary phase. Plans for achieving the same in the secondary sector have yet to be made. Young carers are well supported.

59. Strong multi-agency working is effective in improving attendance. Similarly, good work to address poor behaviour has ensured that the number of permanent exclusions is low. Because of the low numbers, those pupils who are permanently excluded are the most challenging and are often hard to place in alternative provision. However, for some of these young people, alternative full-time provision is not made available within the required timescales, which is not satisfactory. There is good provision for the education of pregnant schoolgirls, young mothers and children unable to attend school for medical reasons. Provision made by parents who choose to educate their children at home is well monitored.

60. Support for the specific learning needs of looked after children is good overall. The guidance on developing Personal Education Plans is good and these are used well as working tools. Almost all children looked after by the local authority have a plan in place. The Looked After Children Education Team makes appropriate additional learning opportunities available, such as support for pupils working towards GCSE, which have contributed to recent improvements in educational achievement and attendance for these young people. These achievements are appropriately reported to councillors and senior officers. All schools have a designated teacher for looked after children, most of whom have received appropriate and recent training. Pathway plans for these children have a strong emphasis on post-16 education, training and employment opportunities.

61. Support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Nine area panels, which are led by headteacher, have specific budgets to draw on to respond to requests from schools for resources to address special educational needs issues. Through this good mechanism, support can be directed at the needs of children at an early stage, quickly and efficiently without, in some cases, the need to pursue a formal assessment. As a consequence of this process, the number of new statements being issued is declining. Statements of special educational need are completed in a timely manner. There is good guidance on the use of specialist ways of measuring the progress of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (for example P-scales) and these are well used. Overall, the monitoring of pupil progress is good, as is the progress that they make. There is a low exclusion rate for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Appeals to the special educational

needs tribunal are low and parents and carers value very highly the educational support that their children receive at school.

62. Parents and carers are given good support to help their children succeed at school, not least through a good range of well written leaflets and specific projects such as the Family Support project. The new children's centres are effective in supporting the most vulnerable groups, with very good integration of services. There is a very good range of recreational and voluntary learning opportunities across the area, including a good range of outdoor parks and play areas. Children with disabilities can access an excellent range of holiday activities to which the authority provides transport where appropriate. There is a very good parent partnership programme.

Making a positive contribution

63. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding.** The council and local partners promote children's and young people's personal, social and emotional development very well. A wide range of opportunities, through children centres, schools and the youth and play service, helps children and young people develop the skills necessary for establishing positive healthy relationships. There is well-structured and highly valued support for parents and carers in maintaining positive relationships with their children, including parenting programmes and support groups.

64. An excellent range of services, including Sure Start, the YMCA, the Oasis Community project and the EYES project, offers advice and support to children and young people in managing change and coping with difficult periods in their lives. Peer mentoring, peer mediation and playground buddy schemes are well established and provide positive support to individual children. Vulnerable young people receive excellent support through well-coordinated, targeted and universal services. Base 25 offers an excellent range of services to support vulnerable children and young people, including young carers and those affected by alcohol- and drug-abusing parents and carers.

65. Participation by looked after children in their planning meetings is good. Most carers and children feel consulted and involved in planning changes in their lives. Families are actively supported to keep in contact with their children, through flexible contact arrangements and practical support to enable them to attend meetings. The advocacy service is showing good and creative ways of engaging looked after children. Councillors and senior managers demonstrate a very strong commitment to corporate parenting, and roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. They receive regular reports on progress and issues concerning looked after children and young people.

66. A good range of respite care is available to children and young people with learning disabilities or difficulties, including residential breaks, a home sitting service and a range of activities available during school holidays. A good advocacy and complaints service is available to children and young people with

learning disabilities and/or difficulties, and a range of communication methods is used to ensure that their views are accurately recorded, including those of children and young people with complex needs.

67. There is a strong commitment from the local authority and its partners to involve children and young people in decision-making processes. Consultation methods are well established, including those to seek the views of the youngest children in the city. Some young people are trained in recruitment and selection and peer inspection. This enables them to be involved in recruitment and inspection processes.

68. Children and young people consistently report that they are listened to and that their views are taken seriously. The Positive Engagement Strategy Group offers excellent strategic direction for consultation and participation of children and young people. School councils are successful and are well supported by a dedicated participation worker. Succession planning for participation groups, such as the Youth Council and the Youth Bank, is well considered and clear.

69. A strong and well-established Youth Council is effective in communicating the views of children and young people to senior officers and elected members, through formal and informal methods. A democratic process is well established, ensuring that the widest views of children and young people are taken into account. An excellent example of this is the work undertaken by the Youth Council Disability Sub-group. Its members are specifically trained to communicate with and seek the views of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with complex needs.

70. An excellent range of programmes has contributed to successfully reducing anti-social behaviour across the city and in identified hot-spots. The Youth Inclusion Support Panel and the establishment of an acceptable behaviour contract officer play a key role in this. The PlayWell project provides a range of programmes and activities to children at risk of offending; an independent evaluation concluded that the project is successful in preventing children from participating in anti-social behaviour and low level crime. Good partnership arrangements between Connexions and the youth and play service ensure that young people at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour receive good additional support, for example two full-time youth workers are seconded to the Positive Activities for Young People programme.

71. Children and young people describe good contact with the police through school and youth clubs. The majority of children and young people report feeling safe and describe good work taking place to promote safety and good behaviour in local areas.

72. Good collaboration between agencies has resulted in a sustained reduction in re-offending rates and a reduction in the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system. The Youth Offending Team is successful in engaging children and young people in offending behaviour work through the

Having An Alternative View on Crime programmes. These are complemented and enhanced by other diversionary interventions available to children and young people who are either at risk of offending or who have offended, for example, through programmes delivered by Base 25 and an outstanding programme delivered by the EYES project to help young people understand the effect of gun crime and to train in conflict resolution methods. There are low rates of offending by looked after children and the Youth Offending Team has begun to offer a good mediation service to children's residential homes to avoid children being prosecuted for minor offences.

73. The Keeping Young People Engaged project provides good support for children and young people who have offended and are serving a Detention and Training Order. The health needs of young offenders are identified and met, for example through the work of the Youth Offending Team and their recent Health Universal Screening Pilot programme. Plans are being developed to implement this on a larger scale.

Achieving economic well-being

74. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** The children's information service is extremely well used and provides parents and carers with a wide range of information supporting families in maximising their economic well-being. Information relating to childcare, tax credits and other benefits are easily accessible in a variety of venues. Childcare placements are sufficient to meet demand, although not all the provision is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all parents, particularly those who wish to participate in family or community learning. The provision for family learning is good and the courses provided are appropriate. They enable the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills as well as other skills that develop the employability potential of individuals. However, plans for the future development and sustainability of this type of provision are unclear.

75. Young people are helped to prepare for working life very well in many aspects. A very wide range of vocational options is available within secondary schools and the curriculum enables the development of self-confidence, team working and enterprise skills. There is a very strong focus on work-related learning and many partners, including the college, work well with schools to provide appropriate learning opportunities. Many pupils opt to take vocationally related courses at Key Stage 4 and this has contributed to the significant improvement in overall attainment levels. However, attainment levels in English and mathematics remain too low.

76. The Connexions service provides good and impartial advice and guidance. This, together with the advice and guidance provided in schools and by others, including the voluntary sector, enables young people to make informed decisions about their future. Post-16 participation rates are high and an increasing number of learners progress to higher education. Personal, financial

and welfare support is readily available to 16 to 19 year olds and arrangements within schools, the college and at training providers for monitoring learners' progress are effective. Challenging, yet realistic, targets are set for improvement and increasingly these are being achieved.

77. The planning and coordination of provision for the 14 to 19 age group is very good. Collaborative working is a very strong feature and relationships between all key stakeholders are excellent. Employers support work-experience placements and other activities well. However, the engagement of employers, in terms of providing opportunities for work-based learning and employment post-16 is at an early stage. Planning to enable the introduction of the new diplomas is well advanced. The already extensive curriculum on offer enables a number of well-planned progression pathways, including good initiatives to target those at risk of becoming disaffected.

78. The provision of education and training post-16 has improved and a more appropriate range of courses is beginning to be offered in school sixth forms. Provision in the college is well planned and the courses offered are well aligned to meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local economy. Training providers, together with the college, offer a variety of work-based learning apprenticeships in a number of vocational areas, as well as Entry to Employment provision. However, access for young people to some Entry to Employment courses is difficult and the places available for pre-Entry to Employment and apprenticeships are insufficient. Employment opportunities are limited and the authority and its partners have not yet sufficiently engaged employers to ensure that young people can progress and become active in the labour market.

79. Education and training providers post-16 are effectively monitored, challenged and supported. Interventions have been made where appropriate and effective action has been taken to address poor performance and to improve the quality of provision. Providers have appropriate equality policies and procedures in place, and most learners irrespective of age or ethnicity interact well.

80. The needs and interests of children and young people and communities are well considered in regeneration planning. Access to leisure and sporting facilities are good. Neighbourhood management arrangements are effective and facilitate consultation across the community. Regeneration initiatives are well targeted at areas in most need, with some projects providing good links with local schools. However, the impact of these in terms of, for example, reducing unemployment is yet to be seen.

81. The authority and its partners, including those from the voluntary sector, provide effective integrated advice and support to young people who face difficulty with housing matters. Vulnerable young people, including teenage parents and care leavers, are provided with accommodation and the council has reduced the average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation.

However, the availability and suitability of some accommodation, including emergency and move-on accommodation, is insufficient.

82. Pathway plans are completed for all looked after young people and involvement in education, employment or training for this group is high. However, aspirations are low and only a few enter higher education. Personal support, basic skills training and social activities are available to all care leavers through a voluntary sector provider and overall contact levels are excellent. However, limited opening times of the drop in centre and high caseloads make it difficult to fully meet the needs of those care leavers who need intensive support especially during evenings and weekends. There is no specific scheme in place to support care leavers who wish to remain with their foster carers after their eighteenth birthday.

83. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well. There are sufficient opportunities to enable progression post-16 and learners who do remain in education or training achieve well. However, employment opportunities for these young people are limited. Transition arrangements are effective and involve a good multi-agency approach. Sound advice and guidance is provided to enable learners to make an informed choice and good personal and welfare support are available. The take-up of direct payments is growing and support to publicise and access this is good.

Service management

84. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** Ambition is good. Partners are strongly committed to meeting the needs of, and improving outcomes for, children and young people. They recognise that key issues relating to children and young people, such as raising attainment and aspirations, have an important influence on the wider regeneration ambitions for Wolverhampton in the draft Vision 2020. The Children and Young People's Plan was developed in a way that fully engaged all partners. Children and young people were consulted extensively, including 'hard to reach groups' such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from black and minority ethnic communities and young offenders. Their views were influential; as a result, the Children and Young People's Plan includes tackling bullying as a priority and Vision 2020 includes a goal to make Wolverhampton 'a city for youth of all ethnic backgrounds'.

85. Prioritisation is good. Fourteen key priorities identified and set out in the summary version of the Children and Young People's Plan provide clarity about priorities. Strong improvement plans exist for the key priorities and areas of underperformance, and these are very specific.

86. Resources are well matched to priorities. Investment is targeted at areas requiring improvement, for example, in building the capacity to improve practice in safeguarding and in equalities, to implement the integrated placement strategy and to expand alternative education. Difficult decisions have been taken where necessary to improve services, for example closing a nursery

for children with complex needs. However, most plans are not explicit about resourcing and some up-to-date strategies are not in place, for example for the youth service and housing for young people.

87. The area provides appropriately for the needs of diverse communities, both in mainstream provision and through a range of initiatives such as the EYES conflict resolution project, the Asian young women's group POZITIV VIBRATIONZ, and support to improve attainment among African Caribbean young people. However, despite these positive initiatives the African Caribbean community remains concerned about a number of issues relating to its young people, including unemployment and the risk of being drawn into crime. The council has responded by working with the community to develop an action plan and this is being led by the Chief Executive.

88. Capacity overall is adequate. Leadership by councillors and senior management is visible and effective and their relationship is very positive while still appropriately challenging. Partners work very well together at all levels. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has effective arrangements through the Governance Board at top decision-making level, the Strategy and Development Board at senior management level and a variety of specific sub-groups. The strong and mature culture of partnership, which is inclusive of the community and voluntary sector, means that issues such as development of a maternity services strategy are tackled jointly by a wide range of interested parties, thus enabling a more holistic and effective approach.

89. There are many good examples of integrated service delivery, for example, the Team Around the Child for children under five with complex needs and Base 25 which provides a wide range of advice, guidance and support for young people. Partnership at local level is strong, through the local area neighbourhood arrangements. These have an increasingly pivotal role in planning and coordinating services to meet local need and involve schools, children's centres and the youth service alongside other council services, police, local projects and other agencies. Whilst there are also examples of effective joint commissioning, such as CAMHS, and of services for children with complex needs, the area is at an early stage in developing a comprehensive joint commissioning strategy.

90. Partnership with schools is very strong, notably through the School Improvement Partnership Board. This has a budget of £20 million, including £4 million from schools' own budgets, and has an important commissioning role. The recent decision to expand alternative education was one made by the School Improvement Partnership Board and the resources have been delegated to eight clusters of schools. In the Audit Commission's school survey, schools gave an overwhelmingly positive response to the full range of issues concerning the services and support they receive. In one secondary school there is an outstanding example of school involvement in regeneration, supported by external expertise through Creative Partnerships. Pupils there are centrally engaged in consultation processes, and issues arising from local regeneration

are incorporated across the whole curriculum. This is contributing to significantly improved motivation. Attainment has also improved.

91. There are deficiencies in a significant number of aspects of human resource issues contributing to inconsistencies in the quality of practice in children and families' social care services. These include high sickness levels in some teams, heavy usage of agency staff, recruitment and retention difficulties, low completion rate of the employee performance review scheme, low training provision, and some individual poor performance not being challenged effectively. Action has been taken to address some of these issues, for example, a strong recruitment and retention package is in place and quality assurance and audit processes have been strengthened. While joint workforce planning is at an early stage of development, there is good commitment and involvement in this by the PCT. Support and supervision given by team managers in children and families' services is valued by staff. ICT systems in social care are cumbersome and inefficient but a new system is to be implemented shortly. A legacy of poor accommodation in social care is also being addressed.

92. Value for money is adequate. In education, spending is about average and services generally good, while in social care, spending is well above average with the quality of services more variable. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities represents particularly good value for money. There are good examples of action that is securing better value for money, such as reduced expenditure on out-of-area placements through the implementation of the placement strategy, and the School Improvement Partnership Board provides rigorous challenge of the spending which is under their aegis. However, a systematic approach to benchmarking of value for money is just developing.

93. Performance management is good. There is strong councillor involvement in performance monitoring. Both the council and PCT have balanced scorecards monitored monthly by senior management. The content of the scorecards is reviewed annually to reflect changing circumstances, priorities and performance. In children and young people's services the scorecards are accessible to all staff through the intranet. Improvement plans for key priorities and underperforming services are also monitored closely. Many improvements are attributable to these processes, for example perinatal mortality and placement stability.

94. The Scrutiny Panel, which includes representatives of the Youth Council, provides good quality, constructive challenge, sometimes penetrating to far more depth than is covered in some of the reports they receive; for example, on a report about action taken to deal with low level disruptive behaviour, the Panel asked how such action had affected exclusions and attendance. There is a wide range of scrutiny reviews contributing significantly to improvements in areas including healthy eating, citizenship education (led by the Youth Council), domestic violence and education of looked after children.

95. The nature and range of involvement of children and young people in evaluating services is outstanding. This includes wide involvement by and through the Youth Council, as well as looked after children, CAMHS users, pupils surveyed on their educational experience and very young children facilitated to express their views on Sure Start. Children and young people have confidence that their views are taken seriously.

96. Analysis of complaints is not undertaken in a way that promotes learning, though the council's approach is currently under review by councillors. Service standards are not published, so users do not always know exactly what to expect from services they receive. There are some good examples of partnership monitoring, for example of Local Area Agreement targets and of key issues through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, but overall partnership performance management arrangements are still under development through the local strategic partnership.

97. Capacity to improve further is good. There is strong and effective leadership by managers and councillors and excellent involvement by children and young people in service scrutiny and development. There is strong monitoring of progress, with appropriate and effective action plans put in place promptly to address deficits. The self-assessment demonstrates good self-awareness in most areas. Key issues for development are stated very clearly. The partnership self-assessed all grades as good. Inspectors agree with that judgement in two outcome areas, being healthy and enjoying and achieving, but judged making a positive contribution as outstanding and staying safe and achieving economic well-being as adequate.

Annex: The children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report

1. The council's performance in this area is good. Outcomes for children and young people are generally adequate. They are good in health and outstanding in making a positive contribution. Children and young people are generally healthy and most appear safe. All children on the child protection register and all looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers. Child protection concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. However, the quality of practice is inconsistent. Families are well supported by a good range of preventative services. Overall, children and young people achieve adequately in school. The achievement of young children in early years is very good, as is the percentage of young people achieving at least five A*–C grades at GCSE. However, achievement in mathematics and English is low. Children and young people have an outstanding range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility. The work of the Youth Offending Team is effective in reducing anti-social behaviour and re-offending. Children and young people are prepared well for working life in many aspects but outcomes for achieving economic well-being are adequate.

2. The management of services for children and young people is good. Ambition is good. Partners are strongly committed to meeting the needs of, and improving the outcomes for, children and young people. Prioritisation is good. Fourteen key priorities are clearly set out. Resources are well matched to priorities but most plans are not explicit about resourcing. The needs of children and young people from diverse communities are well met both in mainstream provision and through specific initiatives.

3. Capacity overall is adequate. Partnership working is strong and well established at strategic and local level and with schools. Leadership by councillors and senior officers is visible and effective. Overall value for money is adequate. There are deficiencies in a number of aspects of human resource issues in some areas of children and families' services, which contribute to inconsistencies in the quality of practice.

4. Performance management is good. Councillors, senior officers and managers are well involved in performance monitoring through effective use of the balanced scorecard. Scrutiny is challenging and contributes well to improvement. Capacity to improve further is good.

5. The impact of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Agencies are working well together to target health inequalities. Parents are well supported. Health promotion work is effective. However, work on reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies is not sufficiently integrated and is failing to impact on the high teenage conception rate. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good, well-coordinated services from all agencies.

6. The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. A wide range of good family support and prevention services is available for children and families, contributing to a reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and looked after. Thresholds for referrals to children and families' services are clear. Inter-agency work is generally good. The timeliness of assessments has improved. However, the quality of assessments varies and some individual poor performance is not consistently identified and addressed. Safe recruitment processes for all staff working with children are not consistently robust. Action has been taken to address this. Support for looked after children and care leavers is generally good.

7. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. Early years education and day care provision is very good. Monitoring, challenge and support for schools is generally good. Effective support has led to improved behaviour and attendance. Permanent exclusions are low but there are unacceptable delays in arranging full-time provision for some of these young people. Looked after children are well supported with their education. There is a good range of recreational and voluntary learning opportunities across the area.

8. The impact of all services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Services promote children and young people's personal, emotional and social development very well. Young people are extremely well supported to develop their understanding of citizenship and decision making. Good arrangements are in place to consult with looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

9. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Young people aged 11 to 19 are helped to prepare for working life well in many aspects. Careers education and guidance and personal, financial and welfare support are good. Academic progress is effectively monitored. Education and training for 14 to 19 year olds is planned and coordinated very effectively. Partnership working with key stakeholders is good. However, employers are not sufficiently engaged to meet the demand for work placed learning and employment for young people post 16 years, and there are insufficient pre E2E places and apprenticeships. There is insufficient appropriate housing to meet demand.