



# Joint area review

Stockport children's services authority area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

## Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate  
Audit Commission  
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)  
Healthcare Commission  
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration  
HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
Ofsted

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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 multidisciplinary team of seven 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. The review was undertaken at the same time as the enhanced youth inspection conducted by Ofsted. A Youth Offending Team (YOT) follow-up inspection was conducted by HMI Probation during the period of the review. Evidence from this reinspection was used in arriving at some of the findings of the review.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Stockport 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 Stockport 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 during October and November 2005. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:
  - a self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
  - a survey of children and young people
  - performance data
  - findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
  - planning documents
  - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
  - evidence gathered during the earlier 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 incorporated studies of how far local services were improving outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in the Davenport and Cale Green neighbourhood of Stockport. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. Discussions were held with elected members of Stockport council 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 carried out.

## Context

7. Stockport is considered to be the most 'typical' district in the country because the 2001 census showed it to be the closest to the national average across a range of indicators. It comprises eight main localities and a town centre covering 21 wards and stretches from the borders of the Peak District National Park to the outskirts of Manchester. The area has a strong industrial heritage of cotton production and hat making and the landscape is characterised by 69 mills and a large Victorian viaduct. Stockport is well served by mainline rail routes, is close to Manchester International Airport, has the M60 motorway running through the town centre and a series of major arterial roads, making it a good location for business while creating problems of traffic congestion. There is a diverse range of business with a particular focus on information technology and financial services.

8. Stockport is the seventh most polarised district in the country reflecting the significant affluence of some areas, six particular wards characterised by socioeconomic disadvantage and some pockets of significant disadvantage within some of the wealthier districts. According to the English Indices of Deprivation 2004, Stockport is the 159<sup>th</sup> most deprived district out of 354. Population estimates show that 284,500 people live in Stockport in approximately 120,000 households. The age profile of the local population is fairly typical of the national averages and there is a relatively small (4.3%) minority ethnic population primarily made up of Asian or British Asian residents. Unemployment at 1.4% of the working-age population is below the north west and national averages and 89% of housing is privately owned, higher than regional and national averages. In the 2001 census, 91% of residents reported themselves to be in good or fairly good health, the average figure for England and Wales, and the prevalence of long-term illness and the standard mortality rates are lower than average, suggesting that Stockport is generally a healthy place to live. Nonetheless there remain some significant health and socioeconomic inequalities for some of the residents of Stockport.

9. Stockport council implemented a major restructuring of services in September 2005, including the amalgamation of the education services, children and families' social care services and the youth offending service into one Children and Young People's Directorate. The former director of social services was appointed to the newly created post of corporate director in early compliance with the requirements of the Children Act 2004. A lead member for children's services has been appointed and the well-established and well-constituted Strategic Partnership Board for Children and Young People has produced a draft Strategic Plan for 2005–08 which, while being consulted upon, is a working document articulating an analysis of needs and some high-order priorities linked to The Community Strategy and The Council Plan. These and other arrangements, such as the shadow Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB), reflect the advanced progress in Stockport in moving towards a Children's Trust and implementing further the requirements of *Every child matters* and the Change for Children agenda. Stockport council area is covered by one Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the residents are served by one Foundation Hospital Trust at Stepping Hill. The council currently looks after 343 children and young people and there are 106 children and young people on the LCSB child protection register.

10. There are 92 maintained primary schools (including infant and junior), 14 maintained secondary schools (known as high schools) and six special schools. There are three pupil referral units. All of the high schools are for pupils aged 11–16 and young people transfer to colleges or work-based learning to continue their education.

11. The council is working closely with the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council, colleges, work-based training providers and schools in implementing a 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by three sixth form colleges, one general further education college and five Stockport-based work-based training providers. Entry to Employment programmes are delivered by these providers, and adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the council.

## Summary report

### Outcomes for children and young people

12. Outcomes for most children and young people in Stockport are good and they are safe. In the main, health outcomes for children and young people are good. The statistics show that most children get a good start in life with below national averages for infant mortality rates and low birth weights. Health surveillance and immunisation rates are good. However, breastfeeding rates and dental decay rates are worse than the national averages.

13. The numbers of children on the child protection register are reducing, as are the numbers of children looked after, but children from the more socio-economically deprived parts of Stockport are over-represented. These numbers

are also gradually reducing. There has been a reduction in the number of children killed or injured in road traffic accidents.

14. Educational standards are better than the national average up to the age of 14. At 16 there is a gap between those in the more prosperous areas who do well and those from disadvantaged areas who underachieve. This gap is not decreasing consistently. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and looked after children achieve better than nationally. The achievement of minority ethnic children is in line with the national average.

15. Children and young people make a positive contribution to their local area and are involved in decisions that affect their lives. There is a decline in numbers of those offending, which the council indicates is in line with the national average. The numbers of looked after children who offend or re-offend has reduced over the last three years and is now broadly in line with the council's target.

16. Participation in education and training by young people post-16 is in line with the national average and improving. The proportion of young people who do not progress to education, training or employment is low but disproportionately higher in the more deprived areas. Overall progression rates to education, training or employment are high. Retention and pass rates post-16 are generally good and satisfactory for work-based learning. The proportion of young people showing anti-social behaviour is reducing and homeless young people are well cared for.

## **Impact of local services**

### **Being healthy**

**17. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.**

18. There is good and effective partnership working across the health economy in Stockport and a collaborative multi-agency approach to meet the health needs of children and young people. Many services have been structured to meet the council's priorities for health. Examples are the specialist sex and relationship education initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancy in the more deprived areas, and the range of services jointly provided by a community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), designed to increase access for children and young people. There is good participation in the National Healthy Schools Programme particularly in primary education. Information is available on the range of services for parents and carers although some parents stated that it was sometimes difficult knowing how to find the information and access services. Stockport has a well-established inclusive and multi-agency approach to meeting the health needs of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Setting measurable outcomes of the impact of a wide range of health initiatives is at an early stage of development.

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## Staying safe

### **19. The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.**

20. Stockport is generally a safe place for children and young people to grow and develop. An effective shadow LCSB is operational and collaborative arrangements between agencies are good. Referral and initial assessment arrangements are good. Services are being refocused and appropriately targeted to increase family support, minimise the incidence of abuse and neglect, provide children with a safe environment and avoid children having to become looked after. These arrangements are beginning to have an impact, although they are at a relatively early stage of development and are not fully and consistently embedded in practice. Arrangements to support children and carers in identifying the risks to safety are good. More vulnerable children such as those looked after by the council are generally placed in safe environments and overall their needs are well met by local services. More local placement provision is currently being developed. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequately provided for and there are good plans to improve provision and outcomes through integrating services by April 2006.

## Enjoy and achieve

### **21. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.**

22. The council works effectively with voluntary and private providers to ensure that children and young people achieve well and enjoy their education. There are some outstanding services. Parents and carers receive very good support, particularly in those areas with the greatest need and the council gives highly effective support to early years settings and schools. There are no schools in formal categories of concern. The vast majority of schools are good or very good and the national strategies are used well to raise attainment. Attainment is very good up to the age of 14, but at 16 there is a gap between those in the more prosperous areas who achieve well and those in more deprived areas who underachieve. This gap is not decreasing consistently. Support for improving attendance is good and the provision for those excluded from school is effective. Children who are looked after, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. The council provides strong leadership on developing inclusion and has a clear strategy to increase opportunities for out-of-hours learning. Some young people in the more deprived areas report difficulty in accessing recreation and leisure facilities.



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## **Making a positive contribution**

**23. The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to make a positive contribution to their communities is good.**

24. There are some outstanding aspects of services to assist children and young people to make a positive contribution. The council ably supports the work of schools and colleges to guide the social and emotional development of children and young people. Those who face major change and life challenges, often through difficult times in their lives, are given good support.. The council is committed to reintegration and the continuation of children and young people's learning, irrespective of their circumstances. It gives children and young people very good encouragement to participate in decision-making and support their school and local area.

25. While the participation of many children and young people is generally impressive, they are insufficiently involved with the draft Children and Young People's Strategic Plan. Children and young people who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are, in the majority of cases, involved in their personal reviews and transitional arrangements, although some feel that they are not always given feedback or involved in further consultations.

26. Partnership activity is beginning to develop well, for instance with different youth and community services working together to prevent anti-social behaviour, including offending, and encourage more positive contributions from children and young people who are most likely to offend. The council is reducing offending and re-offending by children and young people, and youth offending is now in line with national averages. The percentage of looked after children who have had a conviction, caution or final warning has reduced over the past three years and is now in line with the council's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target. The follow-up inspection of the work of the YOT found a significant improvement.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**27. The combined work of all local services in securing the economic well-being of children and young people is good.**

28. Stockport council and the local learning and skills council (LSC) have established a clear strategy for developing 14–19 education and training opportunities and have taken decisive action to bring about improvement. However, not all providers are clear about the expectations being placed upon them to deliver this strategy. The integration of the Connexions services with other council services is good and they provide objective advice and guidance. Vulnerable groups are supported well. Families are helped to improve their economic well-being. Homeless young people and those with special educational needs are well supported and the council and its partners are

implementing fully thought-out strategies to improve outcomes further. Looked after children are well supported through multi-agency collaboration, their outcomes have improved and they are supported well through transitions.

## **Service management**

### **29. The management of services for children and young people in the Stockport area is good. The capacity for improvement is good.**

30. Partnership working is strong. Challenging but realistic ambitions have been set out well in the draft Children and Young People's Strategic Plan and are shared by the council's partners. Prioritisation is adequate with robust action taken in key areas such as provision for looked after children, but financial planning is not sufficiently aligned with priorities. Capacity to deliver existing services is good. Useful organisational changes have been made, capacity has been increased through work with the voluntary sector, and risk management is effective. Overall, the council's services provide good value for money, especially in education.

31. Capacity for further improvement is good. The impact of services is good overall and progress in implementing the requirements of the Children Act 2004 is advanced. However, officers are currently stretched and financial resources are limited, particularly by the legacy of an overspend in social care. While this is being significantly reduced by the council, it is unlikely to be fully resolved until 2007. Performance management is adequate. The inclusion of measurable output targets in new service developments to monitor progress is underdeveloped. Significant improvements have been delivered in key areas, but the council's partners and children and young people are not sufficiently involved in monitoring and managing performance.

32. Stockport's self-assessment shows that the local area has a good and accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. There is a track record of managed improvement in areas identified as in need of development. This reinforces that the capacity for future improvement is good. The council's self-assessment judged the contribution of services to be good and, in some cases, very good. The joint area review found there are no major inadequacies and all services are performing above minimum requirements, with some aspects of some services making an outstanding contribution. In summary, the contribution of overall local services and council and health services to improving outcomes for children and young people in Stockport is good with some significant strengths.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

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## Recommendations

### For immediate action:

- ensure that all plans for new service developments include measurable output targets to monitor progress and barriers to implementation.

### For action over the next six months:

- the council and local LSC should clarify their expectations of local clusters of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to ensure they implement the requirements of the 14–19 strategy
- improve the extent to which neighbourhood renewal strategies address the need to improve leisure and recreational facilities and access for young people in more deprived areas
- ensure that all new service developments are monitored and reviewed to determine their contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people
- ensure that partners and children and young people are more extensively engaged in monitoring the performance of services against outcomes in a coordinated way
- ensure that, following consultation with children and young people, there is systematic and regular feedback on the outcome of consultation
- ensure a more cohesive approach to the wide range of activities addressing issues of equality and diversity.

## Main report

### Outcomes for children and young people

33. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** Stockport is a generally healthy place to live and, in a survey undertaken for this review, a high percentage of children and young people reported feeling quite healthy or very healthy. Perinatal and infant mortality rates are below national averages. The percentage of babies with low birth weight is also below the national average. There is good child health surveillance and immunisation rates are significantly above the national average, although the incidence of whooping cough in children under the age of 15 is slightly above the national rate. Overall, teenage conception rates are below the national average, although there are variations across Stockport and rates are higher in the more deprived areas. The number of women smoking during pregnancy is below the national

average. Breastfeeding rates are significantly below the national average. The number of decayed, missing or filled teeth for 5 year olds and for 14 year olds is above the national average.

**34. Children and young people are generally safe in Stockport.** The numbers of children injured or killed in road traffic accidents has reduced. The numbers of children assessed as 'in need' has reduced to well below the national average. This indicates that assessment services are now targeting services more accurately. However, referrals leading to an initial assessment are currently significantly higher than national and comparator averages, as is the number of those assessments completed within seven days. The number of children on the child protection register reduced from 132 at year end 2004 to 106 in 2005. The council has maintained its top-rated performance for re-registration rates and has successfully maintained the allocation of a named and qualified social worker to all children on the child protection register and for all looked after children. There has been full compliance with the statutory timescales for reviews of children on the child protection register over the last two years. While the number of children looked after has remained consistently higher than the comparator average for the last five years, there is a gradual and sustained reduction as a result of increased access to family support services.

**35. Children and young people achieve well.** Parents and carers are well supported and young children benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities. The quality of early years provision is good and the partnership with Sure Start and private providers is strong. Educational standards are better than the national average up to the age of 14. At 16 there is a gap between those in the more prosperous areas who do well and those from disadvantaged areas who underachieve. This gap is not decreasing consistently. The majority of Stockport's schools are good or very good and the council's school improvement service is highly effective. Attendance is good and exclusions are reducing. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and looked after children achieve better than nationally. The council gives effective support to the development of inclusion. There is increasing provision for out-of-hours learning and the youth service provides a good balance of educational and recreational opportunities.

**36. Children and young people make a positive contribution to their local area and are involved in decisions that affect their lives.** Social and emotional development is good and many children and young people are involved in school councils in and decision-making at their schools. Area wide, a significant number are represented on youth councils and forums. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the majority of those who are looked after express their opinions during their reviews. However, some feel that they are not always involved in making key decisions and in further consultations that affect their personal circumstances. Children and young people who are most vulnerable receive sensitive support, and many are reintegrated back into school and able to continue their learning, irrespective of their personal

circumstances. Much community activity is encouraging a reduction in anti-social behaviour. There is a decline in numbers of those offending which the council indicates is in line with the national average. The numbers of looked after children who offend or re-offend has reduced over the last three years and is now broadly in line with the council's LPSA target.

**37. Children and young people are able to achieve well economically and are well prepared for working life.** Young people's participation in education and training is in line with the national average and improving. The proportion of young people who do not progress to education, training or employment is low but disproportionately higher in the more deprived areas. Higher-than-average proportions of teenage mothers continue in education and training. Retention and pass rates post-16 are generally good and satisfactory for work-based learning. Looked after children perform well in comparison with national trends, as do young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Anti-social behaviour by young people is reducing. Homeless young people are well cared for.

## Impact of local public services

### Being healthy

**38. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.**

39. A variety of activities based on good partnership working and multi-agency involvement are promoted in the local area. Services are well co-ordinated in the Sure Start areas and a number of initiatives such as 'cook and taste' and 'talking together' have been undertaken. A positive parenting course has been particularly successful in supporting a number of parents across Stockport to develop and improve their parenting skills. Parents value this programme and it is having a positive impact. Parents and carers are given good support and advice to help them keep their children healthy. Maternity services are well co-ordinated, accessible and targeted to meet individual needs. The number of mother's who are breastfeeding is significantly below the national average, despite educational and promotional activities and the introduction of peer support groups.

40. Healthy lifestyles are promoted in Stockport through an active health promotion service. The children's national service framework, together with the agenda promoted through *Every child matters*, provide the focus of a multi-agency partnership in the delivery of health services. For example, there is an effective multi-agency approach to reducing smoking and drug and alcohol consumption by children and young people, and related emergency admissions are below the national average. The introduction of a proof-of-age card has been supported by the police force and the local retail industry. The 'Think safe, drink safe' campaign has been introduced to support the accident and

emergency department in preventing underage drinking. In response to a comprehensive lifestyle survey of young people, a cannabis awareness programme was provided and received Department of Health recognition as an area of good practice.

41. Schools, particularly primary schools, actively promote healthy lifestyles and the majority participate in the National Healthy Schools Programme. There is an effective joint-agency approach to sex and relationships education. Breakfast clubs within primary and secondary schools have received financial support from the council to offer and promote healthy choices and this has increased access to healthier food. An active oral health promotion scheme provided within schools and across health services has had little impact so far as rates of dental decay remain above the national average. However, more recent data show an improvement for 5-year-old children, with the rate of dental decay in 2003/04 below the national average.

42. Access to a range of sports and recreational facilities varies. There is good support for after-school schemes and holiday sports programmes although these are not universally available. A small minority of parents were unable to benefit from a free access to leisure scheme and felt that access to some sports activities was prohibitively expensive, particularly for larger families. Other parents interviewed felt that some facilities did not cater for the needs of disabled children and those with sensory impairment and behaviour problems.

43. Partnership working to keep children and young people physically healthy is good. The youth service is particularly effective; Central Youth provides comprehensive sex and relationship support, advice, treatment and education. This service has been instrumental in contributing to the decreasing rates of teenage pregnancy and is further expanding into communities of greatest need. Environmental health risks are minimised through joint working between accident and emergency departments and the health visiting service. Analysis of monthly data on all child attendances at accident and emergency departments promotes a targeted response to prevent further accidents occurring.

44. Good mental health is promoted and there is good access to a wide range of CAMHS. Stockport has looked innovatively at how the needs of children with mild mental health problems and those most vulnerable can be addressed. A range of community-based services is offered; for example, Kite is a service offered on an individual basis to children aged 0–18, although it tends to focus on the 12–15 year olds. Sound Minds offers group intervention to 13–18 year olds and Jigsaw is available to 11–16 year olds, focusing mainly on children who are bullied. There is an online counselling service (Kooth.com) which is valued by health and social care professionals and young people. Multi-agency training provided by CAMHS is good and widely available. There are good links between the accident and emergency department in the hospital and CAMHS and the latter provides an out-of-hours service. The pressures on the availability of specialist hospital beds across the north west and a consequent six-week waiting time for emergency admission to hospital has resulted in

young people with particular mental health needs being cared for on the general paediatric wards, although staff are supported to meet their needs.

45. Health outcomes for looked after children are good. Programmes to meet their health needs are well co-ordinated and access to and take-up of immunisations, regular health screening and dental and optical checks are good. Foster carers are well informed about the health status of the child. Some looked after young people did not feel there was enough information available about sex education, drugs and alcohol abuse.

46. The council's disabilities database provides good information and advice for parents and carers of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. While the details of the database, annual reports and newsletters are on the website, a few parents reported that it was difficult to find. Service provision for the under 5s is well co-ordinated through the children's development unit based at the Treehouse, Stepping Hill hospital. Services for the over 5s are disjointed and a few parents expressed concern about gaining access to services and not being informed and involved in their child's therapy intervention when undertaken in school.

### **Staying safe**

**47. The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is good.**

48. Children and young people and their carers are well informed about key risks to their safety and generally know how to deal with them. They are given good help and advice to support them in their daily lives and agencies offer good signposting to other appropriate services. A wide range of information is provided by voluntary agencies and Sure Start to reduce accidents in the home, and schools routinely provide road safety and stranger abuse awareness training to children. Health visitors receive data from hospitals about accidents, which allows them to target specific interventions and prevent further accidents from occurring in areas of high incidence.

49. Stockport has made good and early progress in implementing the requirements of the Children Act 2004 and the Change for Children agenda. Collaboration between agencies is good. A shadow LCSB is well established; it is refocusing services to minimise the incidence of abuse and neglect and adopt a broad approach to keeping children safe by tackling issues such as avoidable illness and road safety. There is discernible impact in more timely referral and initial assessment processes, multi-agency policies such as the effective 'Missing from Home' procedure, and a managed reduction in the numbers of children who are looked after or on the child protection register. This trend in the reduction of statutory cases has been sustained over three years and reflects the increasing and good range of family support provision in Stockport, such as the Sure Start services and positive parenting groups.



50. To further strengthen the good collaborative arrangements and to equip all agencies to discharge consistently their new duties to cooperate and safeguard children, the local area is implementing a Children in Need model of service delivery and the Common Assessment Framework in a phased way. These arrangements are beginning to have an impact although they are still to be fully implemented and, as a consequence, are not fully and consistently embedded in practice. They require agencies to develop new and changed practices so that children receive the appropriate level of support and intervention in a more timely way and to ensure they are staying safe. This work is beginning to increase the timeliness of responses to children in households with domestic violence and to reduce the re-referral rates to social care services.

51. The governance arrangements to monitor the impact of these changes on children, families and practitioners are good and compliant with the requirements of Lord Laming's recommendations from the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. Case recording in social care is good overall but the recording of decisions to assess a child as in need or in need of protection (under section 47 of the Children Act 1989) is not consistent or always immediately clear. Although agencies agree that the social care thresholds for intervention are appropriate, there are a few staff in schools and the health service who do not yet fully understand and accept these new duties and responsibilities: a few children identified as 'in need' do not currently receive a timely and effective social care service. The LCSB and the relevant agency representatives are aware of, and addressing, these issues.

52. Most arrangements to provide children and young people with a safe environment are good. Children generally feel safe in Stockport and particularly safe in schools, but a few feel less safe in their local community, often stating concern about road traffic accidents. Statistically, children from the more deprived areas of Stockport are less safe, as reflected for example in their incidence on the child protection register and in council care, but this gap is gradually being reduced by the targeting of services in key wards. Examples of this include the considerable work done to make local parks a safer and attractive environment for young people, and the council workers in Brinnington with specific responsibility for supporting children at risk from domestic violence.

53. Specific arrangements to provide more vulnerable children and young people with a safe and suitable environment are adequate with some strengths. Children with mental health needs have benefited from initiatives in CAMHS. The council's KITE and Jigsaw projects complement services provided by the primary mental healthcare and community outreach services, but access is not always timely. Looked after children are placed in safe environments and, overall, their needs are satisfactorily met by local services. Care planning arrangements are sound. There are, however, children placed outside the council area in costly residential establishments and a relatively high number of children in care placed with at home parents. The council is aware that

outcomes for these children are more uncertain and is taking effective steps to reduce this number and to improve the range and choice of residential and family placements available in Stockport.

54. Generally, arrangements to consult with children and young people are good, but a few report that their views are not fully listened to and that they have limited knowledge of or contact with senior decision-making forums that determine future placement plans for them. A few also report a less than facilitative approach to dealing with bullying. Arrangements to review the care plans for looked after children within timescales are good, but a significant number of children report that they are not able to participate as fully as they would like in review meetings.

55. There are good proposals to use the flexibilities available under health legislation to integrate fully the commissioning, planning and delivery of services to children with disabilities from April 2006. This plan will also address the current capacity issues in social care where there are a number of low-priority cases that are not allocated to a social worker and are overseen by a team manager or by a duty officer. Transition arrangements for young people moving from children's to adult social care services are currently inadequate due to the reported differences in eligibility criteria, resulting in some vulnerable children not being supported appropriately. There is, however, a good project to support families in need of respite care and short breaks. The Direct Payment scheme is working well with the number of carers benefiting increasing from 32 in 2004 to 117 in 2005.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**56. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is good.**

57. Children and young people enjoy school and achieve well, and the council has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in the education service. Some services make an outstanding contribution to helping children and young people enjoy and achieve. The council provides high-quality support to parents and carers, particularly in those areas facing the greatest difficulties. In Reddish and Adswood, there is very effective support for families to develop parenting skills and young children benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities such as the Sure Start book bus. Information on school admissions is comprehensive and schools are effective in ensuring that transition is smooth for the majority of children.

58. Early years provision is good and an integrated strategy ensures that education, health and social care work well together to meet the needs of children and their families. Most children make good progress in reaching the early learning goals and children who are potentially underachieving are identified early and given appropriate support.

59. There are good links between early years providers and primary schools which help to prepare children well for starting school; in Reddish these links are extended to include the high school. There is an effective partnership with the early years centre and young people from the school study for their modern apprenticeship through their work placement there. The council has consulted widely on its plans to extend childcare provision and it is developing children's centres in response to the needs of the community. The partnership with the Sure Start programme and private providers is good and there are sufficient and affordable childcare places for parents who wish to access them.

60. The large majority of children and young people achieve very well by the age of 14 and the council has implemented the national strategies effectively in its drive to maintain high standards. Achievement at the age of 16 remains a relative weakness and performance has not increased in line with the national figure. There is a gap between those pupils who achieve well and the underperformance of some vulnerable groups from disadvantaged areas. This is not yet reducing consistently.

61. The school improvement service is highly effective and the vast majority of schools are good or very good. Very good use is made of data to monitor primary school performance and the progress of different groups of children. Significant progress has also been recently made in this area at secondary level. Good support is provided on school self-evaluation and this is linked to a clear process on identifying and supporting schools causing concern. There are no schools in formal categories of concern.

62. The council has now taken positive and decisive action to reduce the number of surplus places in primary schools and is managing falling rolls effectively in some secondary schools. Although financial capacity is restricted, it is prioritising building work in those schools with the greatest need.

63. Pupils' attendance at school is in line with the national average and the educational welfare service is effective. It uses a full range of strategies to encourage good attendance but also works with schools to develop their own practice. This approach has led to significant improvements in attendance in individual schools. The co-ordination of support for behaviour has recently been strengthened and it is now very good. The number of permanent exclusions has considerably reduced during the last year and there is a good range of provision for pupils who are excluded. The pupil referral units provide effectively and appropriately for young people with learning difficulties, pregnant schoolgirls and those with mental health needs. This work is strengthened by good multi-agency working; in particular, there is effective collaboration with CAMHS. Systems to monitor exclusions and manage reintegration are good.

64. Support for the education of looked after children is good and is highly valued by schools. The majority of looked after children achieve better at school than is the case nationally and all have a personal education plan. These are

monitored and reviewed, although some young people told us that they are not properly consulted on their targets. Attendance has improved and all schools have designated teachers who are supported well by the council.

65. School inspections indicate that children and young people with learning difficulties make good progress and achieve well. Council data is analysed and used well to show that they make good progress. There is a good range of provision in both special schools and in units attached to mainstream schools, and inclusion officers provide good support in ensuring that children and young people are placed in the provision which best meets their needs. The council provides a strong lead on the development of inclusive practice and the management of special educational needs is good; 92.5% of statements are now issued on time.

66. The education service has a clear strategy for the development of extended schools, which is being led well by the council. Effective partnerships with both voluntary and private providers are supporting this work and there is increasing provision for out-of-hours learning. In Reddish this is providing increased opportunities to become involved with sports, music and the arts. The youth service provides a range of activities for young people and there is a good balance between recreational and educational support. In Adswood some Year 11 pupils from the local high school are given study support in the youth centre which is helping to improve their achievement. However, some young people feel that a lack of public transport in the evenings inhibits their access to leisure opportunities out of the immediate area and that there are too few places for them to meet locally. The council has recognised this and has put on a late bus to Brinnington from the Reddish area to enable these young people to participate.

### **Making a positive contribution**

**67. The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to make a positive contribution to the area is good.**

68. The council provides and promotes many community projects and initiatives across the area to encourage children and young people to make a worthwhile contribution to their local environment. Some of these services make an outstanding contribution. Children and young people's social and emotional development are supported well by the work of schools and by the youth service. The mentoring of children and young people is strong, notably in schools in the most deprived areas where learning mentors work closely with other staff to support children and young people who experience difficulties with their learning. This support is supplemented by the 'Aim Higher' programme to target support to young people who may be underachieving and/or have no history of further education in their family. The support for pupils to transfer smoothly from one school to another usually involves good communication between schools to ensure that the process is personalised and as seamless as possible.

69. Children and young people who face major change and challenges are given good support through difficult times in their lives. In particular, vulnerable groups of children and young people receive sensitive support through good partnership work and a common purpose. For example, those who find it hard to learn in a mainstream school because of trauma or difficulties with relationships are very well supported in a pupil referral unit, where reintegration back into mainstream school is the main priority; most importantly, their specific learning needs continue to be fully supported through an appropriate school curriculum. Peer mentoring is also a good feature of this supportive environment. Another example of good partnership is in Adswood and Bridgehall where the youth service, YOT and school learning mentors co-operate to ensure that young people who disengage with their secondary school continue their education purposefully in an alternative environment. This further emphasises the importance the authority gives to the continuation of children and young people's learning, irrespective of their circumstances.

70. The council gives very strong encouragement to children and young people to participate in decision-making and support their school and local area. Children in some primary schools, for example, are not only involved in their own school councils to influence changes to their school environment and practices, but they also take part in conferences involving children from other schools. The extent of participation is reflected in the work of school councils and the impact of the Corporate Youth Strategy through active groups such as the youth council, the Young Women's Forum, the Connexions shadow board and young people from the voluntary youth sector.

71. The participation of many children and young people is generally impressive, but a few important gaps remain. These are evident in the draft Children and Young People's Strategic Plan, which does not yet sufficiently embrace the views of children and young people by way of sustained consultation and feedback. Furthermore, consultation is not yet sufficiently extensive with the involvement of more young people from more schools and by those not involved with statutory agencies, especially post-16. Nevertheless, the council is committed to participation and has ambitious plans to build on the Stockport Participation Standards, aspiring to ensure that children and young people are able to express their views on all services that affect them.

72. The council is successful in reducing offending and re-offending by children and young people. For example, the percentage of looked after children who have had a conviction, caution or final warning has reduced over the past three years from just over 16% to nearly 10%, in line with the council's LPSA target. The YOT has made a marked improvement, and has strengthened its links with other services and focuses closely on the prevention of offending and on direct work with those young people most likely to offend. This is leading to more co-ordinated actions in local communities.

73. Actions to target and reduce anti-social behaviour by children and young people provide a good focus for the work of the Safer Stockport Partnership

and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. Local groups such as the Safer Estates Group involve good partnership between the youth service, the police, YOT and community members. The wide and appropriate range of activities include the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts to reduce the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, the Positive Options programme, targeting those likely to offend, and the Junior Youth Inclusion programme in Brinnington.

74. Children and young people who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are encouraged to make a positive contribution and participate in similar ways to other groups across the authority; these specific groups are not particularly targeted. In the majority of cases, they are involved in personal reviews and transitional arrangements, although detailed feedback and further consultation is not always an integral part of the process. Close support for looked after children is illustrated by the work of Connexions personal advisers who have a guidance interview which leads to an education and training part of their 'Pathway Plan' at 15 years of age. For children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, special needs support follows a recognised school-based format with transition reviews at Year 9. They have the opportunity to be involved with the 'Diverse not Different' forum to express their views and be advocates for others about issues that affect their lives. This, in turn, has become a good reference group for the Health Act Partnership.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

**75. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.**

76. Families are supported well to help them achieve economic well-being. Support is targeted at the more deprived areas of the borough where unemployment rates are highest. Economic partnerships are improving employment prospects in these communities as well as for vulnerable groups of young people. Information about childcare as well as education, training and employment opportunities is readily accessible. Advice and advocacy services help families to secure the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled. The local Sure Start programme encourages parents to become involved in their children's education and the community; the proportion of parents who are able to find good-quality childcare is improving. Community-based education and family literacy is helping parents to improve their employment prospects. Provision is planned well and fathers are encouraged to participate in family learning programmes.

77. Neighbourhood renewal strategies are appropriately focused on pockets of deprivation and the council encourages local residents to be involved in their implementation. Levels of anti-social behaviour are declining. The use of parks is increasing, as is residents' overall satisfaction with Stockport as a place to live. However, many young people living in the more deprived areas do not

have sufficient access to leisure and recreational facilities. Lack of transport precludes them from using leisure facilities that are available further afield. The council recognises that not all young people feel safe outside their immediate localities and are often reluctant to travel. Consequently, the aspirations of many of these young people, particularly those who are at risk of behaving antisocially and not continuing with education or training, remain low.

78. Support for young people with housing needs is good. The level of support for homeless families has increased, as has support for teenage parents and children leaving care. Young people are provided with supported accommodation when family mediation has failed. Stockport has reduced the length of stay in hostels and does not routinely use bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families.

79. Connexions services are now well integrated with other council services including the YOT. Personal advisers provide objective advice and guidance and target interventions at areas of greatest need. Collaboration between Connexions and other services is supporting vulnerable young people well. The proportion of young people who do not progress to education or training at age 16 is low, but high in the more deprived areas. The council and its partners have identified the need to broaden quality assurance procedures to cover all aspects of careers education, advice and guidance. Opportunities for young people to develop their economic awareness and enterprise skills at school are limited. The effectiveness of work experience opportunities is being reviewed by the council to ensure they are appropriate to extend opportunities for young people aged 14–16 to follow vocational programmes.

80. Working relationships between the council and the LSC are good. The Greater Manchester LSC is restructuring its management into areas that are coterminous with borough councils. The partners have taken decisive action to establish a good 14–19 strategy and detailed action plan for improving provision and outcomes for young people. As a result, the general further education college and a sixth form college serving the area are merging, and there is coherent and focused activity to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. The 14–19 curriculum has broadened and outcomes are improving. The council's partners have established an effective central clearing house which is helping providers of 14–16 education and training meet the needs of pupils in individual schools. Provision for 14–19 year olds of all abilities in the area is being analysed in detail to clarify progression routes and fill gaps. Colleges, schools and work-based learning providers support the overarching aims of the 14–19 strategy and the actions taken by the key partners. Currently they are not sufficiently involved in bringing about improvements at the local level through the clusters of providers that have been established.

81. Outcomes for looked after young people are good. Transition planning is effective and they receive good support in preparation for leaving care and independent living. Most care leavers are living in suitable accommodation. Programmes of work experience, training and support from personal

employment officers, help these young people make the transition to work. Multi-agency support is strong. The proportion of young people who are looked after at age 16 and who are engaged in education, training or employment at age 19 is very good and continues to improve.

82. The council has well-developed systems for supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for promoting inclusion. Multi-agency working with young people with behavioural problems is well developed. A range of strategies has been developed to support their integration into mainstream schools and supported employment. Good use is made of a pupil referral unit to support integration. All post-16 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good access to work experience. The proportion of these learners who are not in education and training is decreasing. The council assesses the effectiveness of post-16 provision well. It found that all young people do not progress to sufficiently challenging programmes and is reviewing the provision available locally. Good progress has been made with direct payments to children with disabilities and their families and a higher-than-average proportion of disabled children is supported to enable them to live independently.

### **Service management**

**83. The management of services for children and young people in Stockport is good. The capacity for improvement is good.**

84. The council and its partners have established challenging and realistic ambitions for children and young people's services, based on a shared commitment to putting children first. These aims are set out in the draft Children and Young People's Strategic Plan and are reflected in Stockport's community strategy. These plans provide a sound basis for promoting the needs of children and young people and reducing inequalities. A particular strength of the plans is the emphasis they place on moving towards preventive services and on reducing the amount of high-cost, late-stage intervention. This approach is driven by evidence collected about outcomes for children, rather than just by a desire to cut costs. The ambitions are underpinned by a highly detailed analysis of local needs, sometimes down to the level of a few streets. No major gaps in existing services were identified but it has enabled the partners to decide where to roll out new services such as children's centres. Accordingly, the partners have placed appropriate emphasis on areas of deprivation such as Brinnington, Adswold and Bridgehall. However, although information has been collected about minority groups, there is limited evidence within the plans of a cohesive approach to race equality and diversity issues.

85. Consultation on the plan has been wide ranging and characterised by a genuine desire to be inclusive. However, although the views of children and families are increasingly sought through mechanisms such as forums, at present this only involves a limited number of people. The partnership



recognises this and is putting in place more comprehensive consultation arrangements.

86. Prioritisation is adequate overall. There are some good features. The council and its partners have made a strong commitment to the *Every child matters* agenda. The draft Children and Young People's Strategic Plan was in place in advance of the statutory requirement and is being used effectively as a working document. It clearly articulates six shared local outcomes which link logically to the national agenda. The council's service plans reflect these priorities. They support *Every child matters* through specific projects such as reducing reliance on external placements and better management of services for children with statements of special educational need. Similarly, health services have prioritised key areas such as the needs of looked after children. These priorities indicate that generally the local area accurately identifies its areas of strength and areas for development. This is reflected in the council's good self-assessment.

87. However, there are areas where less progress is being made. Financial planning is not well aligned with the new priorities and it is difficult to assess the extent to which the council's resources have been shifted towards changing needs. Furthermore, although the council's partners have worked together to review certain aspects of provision such as the Health Act Partnership for children with disabilities, this has not been done systematically across the local area. Similarly, although there are many examples of work with black minority ethnic and other diverse groups, these services are not fully co-ordinated. Services are generally provided in geographically accessible venues but many of these are not accessible to people with disabilities.

88. The partners have a well-considered view of the type of Children's Trust that will be appropriate for Stockport and are working towards this. Leadership by senior managers is strong. The council has made good progress in putting new structures in place to support change. In particular, a director of children and young people's services is now in post with a well-defined remit. A lead member role has recently been created, although this is still being developed. The Area Child Protection Committee has already been replaced by an effective shadow LSCB, which is a notable achievement. The role of the strategic Children and Young People's Partnership has been reviewed appropriately to reflect its changing role.

89. The council has worked effectively with other agencies to increase capacity. In particular, it has contracted with the voluntary sector for residential placements for children with complex needs, independent visitors for looked after children and advocacy services. However, joint commissioning with partners is at an early stage of development and limited use has been made of pooled or jointly managed budgets. Workforce planning is effective with a clear focus by the partners on shortage areas. For example, the number of permanent social worker vacancies has been halved in three years. The council and the PCT are developing a useful common skills framework for front-line

staff to increase capacity. Common induction has been introduced and is already demonstrating benefits. Work is underway on putting in place a common single assessment and recording system, but this is still at a relatively early stage.

90. Risk management is strong. The council is good at identifying those areas that need immediate attention and those that can perform effectively with a lower level of support. For example, it has targeted high-cost, less-effective residential placements for looked after children. Justifiably, there has been less intervention with high-performing schools.

91. Council services for children and young people generally provide good value for money. Although resources are limited, they are generally well controlled and targeted. Most services are delivered at low cost and with above-average performance. In particular, some education services such as primary schools deliver very good value for money and outcomes compare favourably with those at similar authorities. Central administrative costs are low. Benchmarking data is used effectively, for example when planning action to reduce the number of surplus primary places. Where examples of poor value for money are identified, such as statements for children with special educational needs, prompt action is taken to secure improvement. However, the council is still recovering from a major overspend in social services that occurred in 2003–04. While a significant reduction in the overspend is forecast by the year end this is unlikely to be fully resolved before 2007.

92. Overall, capacity for further improvement is good. The council and its partners are working well to integrate services and improve outcomes for children and have achieved a great deal already. The self-assessment evidences a strong grip on strengths and areas for development and the local area has a track record of delivering key priorities. However, they are working at capacity. Both human and financial resources are well used but already stretched. There is little room to do more within existing resources.

93. Performance management is adequate. There are some positive features. The council has put in place a performance management system and delivered some significant improvements. In particular, the number of looked after children and children on the child protection register has gone down after appropriate action. Improved outcomes have been achieved for looked after children in terms of health, educational attainment and re-offending rates. However, while the performance management system has a number of useful features, it also has weak elements, notably a lack of measurable targets within service plans. This makes it harder to identify potential slippage and take early action. Furthermore, the role of the lead member in performance management is underdeveloped.

94. The council uses scrutiny and best value reviews to effectively focus on areas of underperformance. Relevant topics reviewed recently include special education needs and housing for vulnerable people. As a result, the

statementing process has been speeded up and the lettings policy for 16 and 17 year olds has changed.

95. The council and its partners acknowledge that they have more work to do to develop a co-ordinated approach to performance management. There are examples of services where the partners work together to share data and plan improvement, such as the Health Act Partnership for children with disabilities, but this approach is not embedded throughout all services. Similarly, although the partners are committed to developing a role for children and young people in performance management through the new results-based accountability system, this has not yet been implemented.

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

### Children and young people

1. The council and its partners achieve good outcomes for children and young people in Stockport. Overall, children and young people are safe and those most at risk are protected.
2. Commitment to the *Every child matters* agenda is clearly demonstrated in the draft Strategic Plan for Children and Young People, which has usefully been put in place in advance of the statutory deadline. A thorough audit of needs has identified key priorities such as improved services to looked after children and an increased emphasis on preventive work. An effective shadow LSCB is already in place which is a considerable achievement.
3. Stockport Council generally works well with its partners to improve services for children. The Children and Young People's Partnership is well established and has a clear, shared understanding of priorities. It is committed to improving consultation with and feedback to children and families and to developing more integrated performance management arrangements, both of which it has identified as areas for improvement.
4. Services are good overall and have a beneficial effect on improving outcomes for children and young people. Areas of particular strength include educational attainment up to the age of 14 and services to improve the health and educational achievement of looked after children. There are no major services with significant weakness. Clear performance management arrangements have been put in place to help deliver priorities. However, these are sometimes less effective because the council has not expressed its objectives as measurable outcomes. This makes it difficult to demonstrate the difference actions have made.
5. There is good and effective partnership working across the health economy in Stockport. Levels of teenage pregnancy have been reduced. Access to CAMHS has been improved. Immunisation rates are above the national average and there is good participation in the national healthy schools scheme particularly in primary education. Information for parents and carers is available but they do not always find this easy to access.
6. Children most at risk from abuse are well protected through well-managed referral systems and good interagency collaboration. All children who are looked after or on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and these numbers are reducing over time as a result of more focus on early preventive work with families. Children generally live in safe settings and they and their carers are informed of risks and how to deal with them. The council recognises that the transition of children with disabilities from children's to adult

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services is not yet seamless, and is putting in place arrangements to improve this.

7. High importance is placed on ensuring that children and young people enjoy and achieve. Almost all schools are good or very good. Attainment is very good up to the age of 14, but at 16 there is a gap between those in the more prosperous areas who achieve well and those in more deprived areas who underachieve. Support for improving attendance is good and the provision for those excluded from school is effective.

8. There is effective support to help children and young people to develop socially and emotionally, which is especially strong through difficult times in their lives. They are encouraged to participate in decision-making and support their school and local area, although they are not yet sufficiently involved with the draft Strategic Plan. Partnership working is achieving some success in preventing anti-social behaviour and encouraging more positive contributions from children and young people at risk of offending. Following action by the council and its partners, youth offending and re-offending has reduced to the national average. This improvement is particularly striking among looked after children.

9. Opportunities to prepare for working life are good. The council works effectively with the local LSC to develop 14–19 education and training opportunities and the partners have taken decisive action to bring about improvement. Local clusters of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers are not sufficiently engaged in implementing the strategy. Connexions services are well integrated with other council services and provide objective advice and guidance. Families are helped to improve their economic well-being. Vulnerable groups such as homeless young people and children with special educational needs are supported well. Outcomes for looked after children have improved through multi-agency collaboration and they are supported well at transitions.