

# Joint area review

**Solihull Children's Services Authority Area**

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Review of services for children and young people

Audit Commission  
Healthcare Commission  
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
Ofsted

**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. The most recent Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Solihull judged the council's children's services as good and its capacity to improve as good.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people:
  - at risk or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for
  - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes
  - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
3. The following investigation was also carried out:
  - the impact of the partners' strategy in meeting the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, including those looked after, across the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

## Context

4. The Metropolitan Borough of Solihull is situated to the south-east of Birmingham in the West Midlands and borders onto Coventry and Warwickshire. It has a population of 203,000 (June 2006, ONS), of whom 45,500 (22.5%) are under the age of 18. Diverse Black and minority ethnic communities comprise just over 8% of the population, of which the largest groups are of Indian and Pakistani heritage, although nearly one-fifth of remaining groups are Black Caribbean or mixed White/Black Caribbean. More than 49 languages are spoken by the residents of and students in Solihull, a proportion of whom are refugees and/or asylum-seekers. Around 14% of pupils in Solihull schools are from Black and minority ethnic groups. The January 2008 Schools Census showed that the largest ethnic minority group in schools is of Indian heritage, with the second largest being mixed White/Black Caribbean, and thirdly Pakistani.

5. At the time of the review, there were 367 children and young people looked after by the local authority. Of these, 159 (43%) were unaccompanied asylum-seekers for whom separate funding arrangements were in place. This unusually high proportion of asylum-seeking looked after children results from Solihull being one of the five locations for United Kingdom Border Agency public enquiry offices, which carry out screening interviews for asylum seekers; any asylum seekers thought to be under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or responsible adult become the responsibility of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. There were also 57 children and young people who were the subject of child protection plans.

6. Solihull is characterised as an affluent borough, although there are significant areas of deprivation in the north of the borough, particularly the regeneration wards: Chemsley Wood; Kingshurst and Fordbridge; and Smith's Wood. Over 15,000 people live in areas categorised as being within the 10% most deprived areas in England. Birmingham International Airport and The National Exhibition Centre are located in Solihull, accessible from the M42. The largest employer is the NHS, followed closely by the former largest, Land Rover, and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The eastern half of the borough is mainly green belt, with 0.1% of the borough population living in rural areas and less than 1% employed in agricultural industries including farming, forestry and fishing. The economically active rates, at 85.4% for males and 75.2% for females, are mid-placed within the wider West Midlands region, with average earnings placed fifth highest in the region.

7. Around 34,000 pupils attend 86 Solihull-maintained schools, including 66 primary, 12 secondary, five special schools and three pupil referral units. There are 66 maintained nursery schools and 375 private or voluntary early years settings, including child minders, day nurseries and pre-school groups. At the time of the review, there were 11 children's centres, with plans in place for another three to be opened by 2011.

8. Post-16 education and training are provided by six maintained schools, including four secondary schools and two special schools, with a further school sixth form due to open in September 2008. Solihull also has an academy and a city technical college, both with post-16 provision. In addition, there are two further education colleges: Solihull College and Solihull Sixth Form College. Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council contract with a number of work-based providers across Birmingham and Solihull. There are two work-based training providers operating in the borough: City Technology College (Kingshurst Training) and Solihull College. Entry to Employment provision is managed by Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council, providing 72 'start' places for Solihull College and 74 'start' places for City Technology College. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by Solihull College, with a small amount of wider family learning provision delivered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in libraries.

9. Primary health care is provided by the Solihull NHS Care Trust, which is co-terminus with the local authority. Acute hospital services are provided by Heart of England Foundation Trust and Birmingham Children's Hospital; adult mental health services are provided by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided by Solihull NHS Care Trust and Tier 4, highly specialised, CAMHS are provided by Birmingham Children's Hospital.

10. Solihull Children and Young People's Trust was established in 2004 as a Pathfinder Trust. The council first appointed a Director of Education and Children Services in 2004. At the time of the joint area review, the directorate was undergoing restructuring as Children and Young People's Services in order

to provide integrated services, including youth support services, from September 2008.

11. Children's social care services are provided through eight social work teams, comprising a central duty, assessment and referral team (known as DART), an emergency duty team (out-of-hours), an unaccompanied asylum-seekers team, a children with disabilities team, three children and families teams and a 16+ team. Solihull Children and Young People's Services have no in-house residential provision; however, it commissions the Children's Society to provide a residential short-breaks service for severely disabled children in the borough. Solihull's fostering service provides 104 foster carers and 25 family and friends carers. Prevention services are provided by the Family Focus and family support teams, with remit to give priority to cases of domestic violence, substance misusing parents, and parent and community assessment.

12. The police authority is West Midlands Police. Services to children and young people who are at risk of offending, or who have offended, are provided through the Solihull Youth Offending Service. There are no young offender institutions in the borough.

## Main findings

13. The main findings of this joint area review are as follows:

- Collaborative working to safeguard children and young people in Solihull is good. The council and its partners focus strongly on providing a safe environment, and on reducing anti-social behaviour and crime. An extensive range of multi-agency provision helps children and young people and their families to identify and overcome risks of harm and the number of children in need of protection plans is low. There is prompt help for those most in need of protection, although there is more to do to ensure that local targets for initial referrals are realistic and that administrative arrangements are suitable to deal consistently with the volume of assessment work.
- Outcomes for looked after children, of whom nearly half are unaccompanied asylum-seekers, are good overall. Services to prevent family breakdown and to avoid children being looked after are excellent. Services for those in care are thoughtfully planned, with good levels of contribution from the children and young people, although too few reviews are held on time. Looked after children live in good, safe placements and enjoy good health. Support to look after children in schools is effective. Outcomes for care leavers are good, although arrangements for the allocation of grants and resources are not always satisfactory. The basis of corporate parenting is very narrow.

- Outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good overall. Highly skilled staff in all agencies use well-established, multi-agency working practices to ensure that there are good outcomes in health, safeguarding and educational attainment; social and emotional development is skilfully supported. Those who participate in play, leisure and youth provision do well. The views of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been highly influential in securing recent improvements in access to a range of play facilities, although access to play, leisure and youth provision is not uniformly good. There is insufficient information about services and provision in accessible formats.
- Outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are good. Strong support from a skilled, specialist team and good collaboration with voluntary sector partners ensure that key safeguarding, health and education outcomes are good. The young people make a good contribution to services, but improvements are not systematically evaluated. There are gaps in support, particularly for moving on well to adult life.
- Management of services for children and young people is good. With established partnerships, good workforce capacity and strong leadership in place, the capacity to improve further is good. The council and its partners focus clearly on 'narrowing the gap' and the principles of listening to the views of children and young people are embedded. The positive impact of regeneration initiatives is evident in public safety, health and education. A commissioning strategy is not fully mature and some aspects of performance management are not rigorous enough.

## Grades

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

	<b>Local services overall</b>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Looked after children</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Learning difficulties and/or disabilities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Service management</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>3</b>

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- devise policies for the allocation of leaving care grants and of resources which are clearly understood by care leavers and are in line with their preferences
- improve the number of looked after children reviews held on time.

### For action over the next six months

The local partnership should:

- ensure that administrative systems in the DART are fit for purpose
- improve information in formats accessible to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents and carers on the provision and services available
- take a more strategic, council-wide approach to corporate parenting and ensure that the impact of initiatives to improve outcomes for looked after children is monitored by:
  - increasing support, including the allocation of Connexions personal advisors, to asylum-seeking young people when preparing for moving on to adult life
  - reviewing targets within priorities to ensure that they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound).

### For action in the longer term

The local partnership should:

- ensure consistently good standards of accessibility in leisure, play and youth provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and increase take-up
- agree and implement a joint commissioning strategy.



## Equality and diversity

14. Solihull has an active approach to meeting the diverse needs of its communities, described as 'narrowing the gap', but there is a lack of detailed and comprehensive understanding across all service areas of the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Until recently, the understanding of diversity was based on the presumption of a North–South divide in health, educational achievement and economic well-being. The council, NHS Health Care Trust, the police and other partners are at the early stages of collaborating to build a more sophisticated understanding of needs through a project know as the Solihull Observatory. Regeneration initiatives in the most deprived wards in the north of the borough aim to benefit children and young people through improvement to school and post-16 provision, housing and active leisure facilities. Some impact is already evident in the improving achievement of most targeted groups of pupils and improved school attendance rates. Well-established partnership working with the voluntary sector benefits targeted groups, although not all information and access for children and young people with learning difficulties, mobility, hearing or visual impairment meets best practice standards. Over 70% of the area to the south and east of the borough is characterised as rural green belt; with less than 1% of the population resident or working there, the predominant issue is access to a good range of services for young people. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the school-age population is well understood and needs are met. Education support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for looked after children, including the 47% who are unaccompanied asylum-seekers, promotes good achievement among these groups.

## Safeguarding



15. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk or requiring safeguarding is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Impressive multi-agency focus given to safeguarding.</p> <p>Very effective leadership from a well-established Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).</p> <p>A good range of highly effective, high quality preventative services.</p>	<p>Electronic administrative systems in DART are too cumbersome for the purpose, leading to delays in finalising processes.</p> <p>Planning for the proportion of social care referrals leading to an initial assessment of need.</p>

<p>Well-managed child protection services, with low numbers of children remaining on child protection plans.</p> <p>A well-resourced duty, assessment and referral service.</p> <p>A comprehensive range of excellent and well-attended multi-agency safeguarding training courses.</p> <p>A good range of CAMHS, including for those who misuse substances.</p> <p>Effective sexual health promotion, substance misuse prevention and personal safety awareness is delivered through a range of multi-agency initiatives.</p> <p>Effective multi-agency action to prevent anti-social behaviour and crime and to promote community safety.</p> <p>Excellent systems in place that track children who are not in school to ensure that they are safeguarded.</p>	
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16. Safeguarding is a key and sustained priority in Solihull. Children and families are provided with a safe environment through effective multi-agency preventative action. There is good information and guidance available for families and children, which enables them to recognise key risks to their safety and to avoid dangers. Road safety is very good and street crime figures relating to young people are very low. There is an effective multi-agency anti-bullying strategy in place that is showing a positive impact. Racist incidents in schools are reportedly very rare and are effectively dealt with. Children and young people are cared for and educated in safe environments in schools, early years settings and youth clubs. Child protection procedures are widely understood. There are good family support services available to vulnerable parents to enable them to provide continuing care to their children.

17. Effective sexual health promotion, substance misuse prevention and personal safety awareness are delivered through a range of multi-agency initiatives, which are sensitive to the cultural needs of young people. The recent Safeguarding Week activities effectively involved young people, including young unaccompanied asylum-seekers, in giving drama performances and street publicity events to publicise child protection procedures. Good progress has been made towards comprehensive CAMHS, and this is making a satisfactory impact on decreasing the need for referrals to specialist services. Waiting times

for service, including for those with non-acute needs referred by the Youth Offending Service (YOS), are low. A robust Young Person's Substance Misuse Plan is in place and CAMHS undertake prompt substance misuse assessments and provide swift access to skilled intervention.

18. There is good multi-agency action to prevent anti-social behaviour and crime and to promote community safety. Prompt action is taken, for instance, to remove racist graffiti within 48 hours and anti-graffiti paint is widely used. Positive activities, such as those delivered through North Solihull Fusion (a sports-based project), are well targeted. The successful Youth Inclusion Support Programme (YISP) has been effective in helping to reduce the number of young people coming into the youth justice system. All those who are reprimanded are referred to the YISP-Plus scheme, managed by the YOS, and are offered a tailored preventative service. The recent inspection of the YOS found good improvements in attitudes and behaviour in a large proportion of cases sampled, and strongly positive outcomes for certain aspects of community orders. Re-offending rates are low.

19. The DART, including the out-of-hours service, is well resourced, with a high level of management input in DART. The quality of the work in DART is generally good. There has been an increase in the number of referrals, partly due to increased awareness of domestic violence, and timeliness in assessing need has improved to good levels. The introduction of a new electronic database and the Integrated Children's System has added significantly to the workloads of social workers. A significant number of cases remained 'open' on the system for up to 11 months although the work had been completed with good management oversight throughout. Steps have been successfully taken to improve DART processes; local data show the percentage of assessments recorded as being completed on time has improved and at around 75% of cases current performance is better than that of statistical neighbours and the country in the previous year. The number of repeat referrals is falling and is in line with the national average. Thresholds of eligibility for social care services cover a range of needs. The quality of initial and core assessments carried out is of a high standard; they are detailed and comprehensive. For a number of years the percentage of referrals that have lead to an initial assessment has been significantly, up to 85%, higher than in comparable authorities and compared with the national average. Setting local targets for this area of performance to inform the Directorate Management Team and Solihull LSCB has proved impracticable; the 2007/08 targets were too low. The council and partners recognise there is more to do to set the correct expectations.

20. There is a very good range of high quality preventative services. Awareness of safeguarding is very high in the police, schools and across all agencies. There is a sustained history of effective multi-agency working. The respective roles of agencies are widely understood by front-line workers. Although there was a considerable amount of high quality training to launch the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in 2006, it has only very recently begun to impact on outcomes, such as a fall in numbers of referrals to specialist

CAMHS. Thresholds are agreed and generally understood by other agencies. There is very good practice in systematic high level audits, including joint audits of police and DART work, to ensure the quality and appropriateness of referrals.

21. The child protection service is good, with all cases allocated to a qualified social worker and all reviews of child protection plans carried out within statutory timescales. The level of children subject to child protection plans is low in comparison to national averages and in line with that of statistical neighbours. Cases are well managed and few children remain on child protection plans beyond two years. Although the level has risen significantly in recent months, there are good processes to prevent children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second time or subsequent time and outcomes are very good compared to the national picture. Case recording is clear and comprehensive. Cases that were sampled provided good evidence of regular and effective supervision and, in one case, management intervention to remedy delays. The council has good policies, procedures and practices in place to identify, assess and monitor private foster carers.

22. Solihull's LSCB is well established and its membership is in line with legislation and guidance. The LSCB provides high profile strategic leadership and effectively identifies key risks in the community, such as internet bullying. There has not been a serious case review in last two years. However, the LSCB encourages partner agencies to carry out internal management reviews as a matter of good practice; these are routinely carried out and implementation is followed up. The LSCB has delivered a well-attended and highly regarded multi-agency training programme. Well-coordinated, multi-agency policies, procedures and training are effective in supporting work with children and families who experience domestic violence.

23. There are excellent systems in place that track children who are not in school to ensure that they are safeguarded. There are robust procedures for controlling the removal of pupils from school rolls, to ensure that each individual's whereabouts are known. Good arrangements are in place to ensure vulnerable and excluded children remain in learning. Children and young people educated at home are carefully monitored. Solihull Carers, a voluntary agency, provides good support to some 70 identified young carers, building on a comprehensive audit of young carers' needs carried out by the agency two years ago.

24. There was a large increase in complaints against Education and Children's Services in 2006/07, of which all but two of the 40 were resolved at the first stage of investigation. The use of complaints information is not yet analysed comprehensively to gain improvements in local services. The NSPCC is commissioned to run a good range of easy-to-access advice, advocacy, counselling and participation services for young people aged 9–24.

25. The YOS and social care services have good links into a strong and effective Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement that manages offenders, including young offenders, who pose risks to children. The council's recruitment policy and practice is fully compliant with statutory requirements and best practice. Criminal Record Bureau checks, and other checks, are systematically undertaken and are closely monitored.

## Looked after children and young people



26. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Excellent services to prevent family breakdown and to avoid children being looked after.</p> <p>Very good care planning, particularly within court proceedings.</p> <p>Very high levels of participation of young people in their reviews.</p> <p>Routine and regular involvement of looked after children and care leavers in contributing to service development.</p> <p>Good stability of placements and a good focus on moving to long-term and permanent placements when it is appropriate for the child or young person.</p> <p>Good levels of accredited educational achievements, including very good numbers of care leavers attaining five or more good GCSE grades and high levels going on to education, employment or training.</p> <p>Outstanding collaboration to provide 100% of care leavers with suitable housing.</p>	<p>The numbers of reviews held on time is too low.</p> <p>The approach to corporate parenting is too narrow.</p> <p>Aspects of leaving care benefits are unsuitable: the criteria for allocating leaving care grants are not clear to care leavers and the system of bulk purchasing some furniture items does not promote independence.</p> <p>No systematic monitoring of initiatives.</p>

27. There are extensive, high quality services to families to prevent family breakdown and to avoid children coming into care. Whilst the number of looked after children has risen steadily over the last six years, the increase in numbers is accounted for by the rise in numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving through the United Kingdom Border Agency screening centre in the borough, and who now comprise nearly half of the looked after population. The proportion of the local population of children and young people in care has remained stable during this period and is in line with that of statistical neighbours. Children in care receive good support from their social workers and from education and health services. Care leavers are highly satisfied with most aspects of the help they receive to find education, employment, training and housing when they become adults, although some aspects are not as well planned and clear as the young people would like. Many outcomes for care leavers are better than the national average. Although the council gives a very high priority to services for looked after children and care leavers, a corporate parenting approach is not embedded across the whole council.

28. There are excellent and well-resourced preventive services. The council and its partners work very effectively to maintain children within their families and to prevent family breakdown. Multi-agency collaboration through 11 children's centres supports very young families. High quality family support services are widely deployed. A dedicated team, Family Focus, responds effectively to the needs of young people at risk of coming into care and to their families. However, there is no family group conferencing service. There are sound planning processes at the point of entering care. A monthly meeting of senior managers ensures consistent practice throughout the borough and a robust challenge to care decisions.

29. Services for children and young people who become looked after are good. The standard of social work practice is very good, with high quality case recording and regular visits by social workers to children, including those who live outside the borough. Care planning is sound and care proceedings are managed efficiently and within timescales. The inspection of fostering services in January 2008 found the service to be good overall, with good progress on previous key issues relating to staying safe and management organisation. The fostering service is successful in retaining and supporting foster carers, who are skilled and competent in meeting the needs of young people and in enabling them to achieve positive outcomes.

30. There are sufficient placements for looked after children, although the large number commissioned from the independent sector has resulted in high unit costs. Whilst 41% of children are placed outside of the borough, the majority live nearby, no more than 20 miles from their home address. The stability of placements is very good in national terms and has improved steadily for three years, although not so consistently for those who have been looked after for two and a half years or more. The success of the area in placing local children with family and friends is acceptable. The council has improved the time taken to carry out assessments of potential carers and there is now good

support for children in this type of placement. However, with a high proportion of looked after children being unaccompanied asylum-seekers without relatives in the country, the extent of family and friends placements cannot reach the levels found on average elsewhere nationally. There is steady development in specialist fostering services, including an active approach to finding placements for those young people who are unaccompanied asylum-seekers. There is good practice in reassessing foster carers before they can be approved as permanent carers, although the council has yet to issue guidance explaining the implications to children, their carers and birth families. High proportions of looked after children are placed for adoption and the quality of adoption support is good.

31. The council's independent reviewing officers are knowledgeable and confident in their ability to challenge decisions. An outstanding rate of participation by children and young people in their reviews has been achieved; at 95% this is well above the level in comparable authorities and the national average. Children in care of all ages and abilities are being encouraged to chair their own reviews. Some with learning difficulties and as young as 10 have done so and are now training others. The council's practice of retaining the care status of its unaccompanied asylum-seeking children until their eighteenth birthday is to be commended. However, the growth in the population of looked after children that this has brought about, and the general unpredictability of the growth in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, have put pressure on a number of areas of performance, notably the timeliness of reviews. In 2006/07, the rate of reviews conducted on time was 78%, well below the acceptable national average of 85% although the figure for local looked after children alone was good at 87%. Local figures that are not yet benchmarked against the national average show that attention to improving timeliness, particularly for the unaccompanied asylum-seeker group, has improved overall performance and the cumulative figure for the year at the time of inspection 82.6%. The advocacy support service commissioned from the NSPCC reports pressure on its ability to provide timely support.

32. Looked after children's health needs are addressed well. The percentage of children having annual health assessments and regular dental checks is well above both statistical neighbour and the national averages. There is prompt access to specialist and universal CAMHS. A comprehensive strategy to promote healthy lifestyles is in place, but pregnancy rates within the looked after and care leaver populations are not monitored to measure the strategy's effectiveness in the longer term.

33. Educational outcomes for looked after children are good. The EDULAC Team, the education team for looked after children, which is led and managed by a virtual headteacher, provides highly effective targeted support. The progress of each pupil is closely monitored and many do well at each key stage. In 2005, schools and education providers set targets for those young people who would be at the end of Key Stage 4 in July 2007. Of these, 16 out of the 20 targeted young people achieved or exceeded their predicted outcomes and

all but one gained an accredited qualification. Although the percentage of children in care sitting GCSEs in Year 11 has been below the national average for a number of years, many care leavers, including those from the unaccompanied asylum-seeker population, take GCSEs and succeed in Year 12 and beyond. The proportion of young people leaving care, over 16 years of age, with at least one GCSE at grades A\*–G is rising consistently year-on-year, reaching 53.3% in 2006/07, in line with the national average. The percentage of the care leaver group gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C has also increased steadily, with a very good 20% of the cohort attaining at this level in 2006/07, compared with 9.8% nationally. Robust systems ensure very high levels of school attendance. At 13.4% missing 25 or more education days per year, the looked after children attendance level is better than that found in comparable authorities and in line with the national average.

34. Support to care leavers is satisfactory overall, although it is a mixed picture. There is an excellent relationship with housing providers and the priority given to care leavers ensures that 100%, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, go into suitable housing. The proportion of those in care at age 16 who are in education, employment or training at the age of 19 is very high: 93% in 2006/07, compared with 78% nationally. There is an effective protocol with adult social care services which results in case responsibility transferring smoothly when appropriate. The 16+ service runs or commissions a number of innovative projects, such as the Healthy Living project and the independence skills courses, which are well taken up. However, there is not any effective evaluation of how well these services improve the outcomes for looked after children. Whilst care leavers had a high regard for the 16+ service and pathways plans are made they reported difficulty in contacting their social workers and did not believe their pathway plans were adhered to. In addition, care leavers do not understand the criteria for leaving care grant. They have no say in the system for bulk buying furniture, which is unpopular and does not promote independence.

35. The range of opportunities for looked after children and care leavers to contribute to the development of services is extensive, and support to enable them to participate is good. Representative children and young people routinely take part in the recruitment of social work staff, including senior managers. The KIC magazine includes contributions from and asks the opinions of looked after children, including unaccompanied asylum-seekers and suitable levels of English are used to take account of the needs of those with English as an additional language. The LACPAC information packs, attractively modified for different age groups, are comprehensive and have recently been revised with the help of looked after young people. However, the council does not yet systematically review the uptake and impact of these good initiatives.

36. It is evident that the acting Chief Executive and the Lead Member for Education and Children's Services are committed to meeting with looked after children and hearing about their experiences. Their contact with looked after children has led directly to improvements in services, such as clarification of the



policy on sleepovers. However, there is no strategic body to drive corporate parenting forward in the long-term and to set challenging targets for children in care. Councillors, other than the Lead Member, do not routinely meet with or hear from looked after children. The council's limited practice of providing work placements or supported employment for looked after children only within the Children and Young People's Department is evidence of the narrow approach. The Government guidance, Care Matters, is being used to shape and revitalise the corporate parenting agenda, but plans are at an early stage.

## Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Inadequate  Adequate  Good  Outstanding

**37. The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Effective support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through good multi-disciplinary work.</p> <p>Strong support to emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.</p> <p>Highly collaborative approach to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and early intervention initiatives.</p> <p>Good educational attainment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Significant improvement to the range of accessible leisure, play and youth facilities as a result of listening to the views of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p>	<p>There is insufficient information in formats accessible to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents and carers on the provision and services available.</p>

<p>Good personal and practical support arrangements to improve children's ability to make a contribution both in and out of school.</p> <p>Good transition arrangements between school phases and into adult life.</p>	
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38. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported through effective multi-disciplinary work. Outcomes in health, safeguarding, enjoying and achieving are good. Outcomes in making a positive contribution and preparation for economic well-being in adult life are at least satisfactory. Children and young people benefit from skilled support to their social and emotional development and when making changes and transitions in their lives.

39. Health professionals give a strong lead in the early identification of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Records of health interventions are comprehensive and shared regularly with other professionals, for instance as part of Personal Education Plan reviews. Clear guidance helps professionals to assess children and young people with complex needs. The Meadow Centre, where the Children's Disability Team is based, provides a wide range of assessment and therapeutic resources for individuals and groups. The integrated services successfully provide one point of access for all services.

40. Support to promote emotional and social development and mental well-being is good. Skilled staff use their detailed knowledge of individual needs to help children settle when starting school or when moving on between primary and secondary schools. CAMHS are highly valued at the point of access by parents of those, for example, with attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and by other professionals. The YISP, commissioned from the Children's Society, provides tailored programmes to support behaviour in schools and collaborates effectively to help with the identification of children's learning needs. Improvement in behaviour outcomes for children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties is good, with evidence of a reduction in fixed-term exclusions from schools. This contributes to the low percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need who have fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools: about 20% in the area, compared with over 30% nationally.

41. All eligible children access some form of short-break (respite) provision when needed. An effective short-break panel comprising representatives from health, social services and voluntary providers meets regularly to review the population needing breaks and to decide what will be provided. Respite is provided by St Christopher's, voluntary sector provision, Family Link fostering services and Lyndon House, managed by Solihull PCT. Some children and young people are in hospice provision. The quality of respite care is good. However, the quantity of provision is too low and some children with autistic

spectrum disorders are not eligible for all forms of respite under the current criteria. A commissioning strategy has been drafted in partnership with voluntary and community sector providers but it needs refreshing and has not been implemented. The need for development is recognised by the Children and Young People's Trust and additional funds have been allocated through the Government's Investment to Improve Services for Disabled Children scheme.

42. The integrated approach to meeting the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and providing early intervention initiatives is good. Educational records are good; plans are clear and appropriately relate to specific needs. Personal Education Plans are completed and realistic, measurable targets are set. The council has moved resources in order to integrate the early support programme into mainstream schools and provide timely and integrated support. Teachers receive good responses from health services when children's medical needs are identified. Statements of special educational need are detailed and produced on time.

43. The educational attainment and progress of most children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The council tracks and monitors the outcomes for pupils receiving all levels of help in school – comprehensively so for those with statements of special educational need – and good progress for individuals is demonstrated. The council has worked with other authorities in the region over a 10 year period to gain an external view on progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Most children and young people with statements of special educational need achieve well in mainstream and special schools. All schools inspected since January 2004 have been graded as satisfactory or better regarding the progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attendance is closely monitored and absence is very low for those with all levels of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of children receiving a statement of special educational need has increased by 9% since 2005, although the percentage is low, and at 2.6% of all pupils is below the level in comparable authorities and the national average of 2.8%. In 2007, there were 129 statemented pupils at age 16, of whom 93% achieved a recognised accredited and challenging qualification. Solihull usefully carries out internal inspection and a peer review to assess the quality of the provision within its schools. A wide range of well-resourced provision is offered in the borough for those with the most complex needs including, for example, well-planned dual school placements on the extended campus at Reynalds Cross School.

44. Personal development outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities taking part in leisure, play and youth activities are good. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enabled to develop impressive inter-personal and social skills in youth provision, including representing others in the UK Youth Parliament. The involvement of children and young people in evaluating and shaping services in the voluntary sector is good. In special schools and the voluntary sector, skilled workers extensively use appropriate pictorial prompts to enable the young person to

understand what is on offer and involve them in planning activities for themselves. With a strong lead from the St Christopher's project, as part of the Children's Society, children and young people campaigned successfully for better access to park play facilities. Four playgrounds in the borough have been converted to provide access for those with physical disabilities and, in some parks, sensory experiences. Such considerations now form part of routine planning processes. Play staff are appropriately trained and qualified to deliver the service.

45. However, the range of leisure, play and youth provision to meet the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is still insufficient and take-up is low. In the best schools and settings, access has been considered very well, but at some generic public leisure facilities, provision does not meet high standards of integrated access. For example, access for wheelchair users to the changing rooms at the refurbished sports centre swimming pool and in some youth settings is not integrated. The range of information material produced by agencies in an accessible form to promote participation in the wider community is limited. Most information relies almost exclusively on text. There is too little information for children and young people in large print and few information brochures, leaflets or posters with pictorial prompts or simple language. The council has been slow to develop a website for young people and the site does not provide accessible, young-person friendly links. Similarly, information for parents on the provision and services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is insufficient. Many parents are unaware of direct payments, or of the eligibility criteria. Information about sports, leisure, play and youth provision or support and advocacy organisations is not widely publicised.

46. Support for preparation for adult life and economic well-being is satisfactory. The transition pathway guide is comprehensive and detailed. Adult and children's services liaise closely and records of interventions are shared. Around 90% of young people receiving CAMHS had a transition plan to support their move to adult mental health services in 2006/07. The area's own data show that the percentage of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, employment or training at age 16, an area for development identified in the APA letter of 2007, has significantly improved, dropping from nearly 20% in April 2007 to about 9% in March 2008. Clear pathways to local colleges have been established through good collegiate arrangements between schools, post-16 providers and employers within the 14–19 partnership. Collaboration with specialist day and residential colleges, and with training and work-based learning providers has been effective in securing sufficient provision. Provision for those with learning difficulties was previously too narrow and has improved with this provision. It is too early to know the outcomes of the higher rates of engagement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education and training. Cooperation between the Connexions service and Community Housing ensure that all vulnerable young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have suitable independent, supported or family housing.

## Other issues identified for further investigation

### Outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people

47. The impact of the partners' strategy in meeting the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, including those looked after, across the five Every Child Matters outcomes, is good.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Effective promotion of the health of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people.</p> <p>Effective measures to keep unaccompanied asylum-seekers safe and living in a safe environment.</p> <p>Some good educational outcomes.</p> <p>Strong support from the well-qualified Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's (UASC) Team, enabling children to achieve good outcomes.</p> <p>Good multi-agency collaboration between the local authority and its partners, including the voluntary sector.</p> <p>Good initiatives to improve key features of the service.</p> <p>Good provision of suitable housing for care leavers.</p>	<p>Insufficiently systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, and insufficient use of data to further improve performance.</p> <p>Insufficient capacity in a few areas to meet current needs effectively, notably the provision of Connexions personal advisors and training and guidance to prepare young people for all aspects of adult life.</p>

48. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people receive good support from highly committed staff. Their care, accommodation, health and educational needs are met well and they receive satisfactory support when preparing for independent living. The number of these children has increased rapidly over recent years, primarily due to the rising numbers who arrive at the United Kingdom Border Agency offices in Solihull. Services are responsive to increasing demands but are unable to fully meet all needs, for instance regarding preparation for adult life, within existing resources. Partners recognise the need to increase capacity by the appointment of additional social workers, more administrative support and more personal advisers for care leavers. Performance management for post-16 services and outcomes is

underdeveloped. Partners recognise the need to more regularly and systematically evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of the service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people and to make better use of data to further improve performance.

49. The creation of a highly committed UASC Team, with qualified social workers, has enabled young people to receive a service tailored to their needs. Effective collaborative working with neighbouring local authorities, the Refugee Council, the UK Border Agency and a number of voluntary organisations has helped to improve services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. The skilled operational management of services has had a positive impact on outcomes for these children and young people. Collaborative work between the social work and education teams is good. Several positive initiatives are starting to improve key features of the service, such as induction, assessment and the setting of individual targets.

50. Health outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are good. Health screening and assessments are timely and healthy lifestyles are promoted. Young people demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and substance misuse prevention. Visits to the dentist and optician are arranged promptly and there is good support from a specialist nurse. Sexual health promotion is presented in a culturally relevant way. Young people appreciate the befriending service (BUMP) and the access to counselling services. Services provide good opportunities for young people to stay healthy through participation in sport and recreational activities. Social workers are sensitive to issues of emotional well-being and have considerable knowledge about the principles of effective timing of social work and mental health support. However, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children interviewed during this review were insufficiently aware of the full range of services, including CAMHS, where they can get support for their emotional and mental health needs.

51. The provision to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation is good. All new arrivals are allocated to a social worker and their care planning and social care are good. There has been a good increase during the last six months in the overall numbers of looked after children with allocated social workers, from around 85% to 93%. The service provides suitable training for foster carers and good attempts are made to place younger unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with carers from the same ethnic background. Placement stability is good and most young people feel well supported in their foster homes. Arrangements to establish the whereabouts of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children missing from care are effective. There is better use of specialised assessments to meet the individual needs of young people. A specialist accommodation officer works vigorously to ensure that residential accommodation is of a decent standard. Social workers, foster carers and other agencies collaborate well to ensure that young people are kept safe. Children are well informed about risks to their personal safety and how to deal with

them. There are few reported incidences of bullying or racism and these are dealt with promptly.

52. Outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in education are good and they are encouraged to achieve highly. The percentage achieving at least five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*–C was high in 2007, and better than in 2006. Many achieve higher grades than was predicted in English, maths and science. More recent arrivals with little knowledge of English make good progress and all achieved entry level qualifications in language and communication skills in 2007. The EDULAC Team provides a wide range of effective support. Arrangements to get young people into schools are good and timely. Good links with schools in other local authorities enable their progress to be closely monitored. Personal Education Plans are good and the authority is introducing standard induction procedures to improve the quality of information on the children's prior experience of education. Attendance patterns and arrangements for monitoring attendance are good. The EDULAC Team is introducing more precise targets to measure children's progress and performance. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children speak positively about their teachers and the good teaching. The local authority recognises the need for greater involvement by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in sports and recreational activities, and initiatives in the north of the borough are starting to address this.

53. Arrangements to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are helped to make a positive contribution are good. Increased resources have led to further improvements in the timeliness of their reviews, although this figure is still too low. However, participation rates are high, at 95%, compared with a national average of about 85%. Children are supported well in making changes and responding to challenges in their lives. There are suitable opportunities for them to participate in activities where they can express their views, such as school councils and making contributions to the council's Safeguarding Week. Good use is made of community networks and interpreters to support them in these activities. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people expressed an interest in increased opportunities for them to influence decision making about services and to contribute to their wider community.

54. Transfers of cases within the UASC Team are well managed. A small proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people over 18 do not have allocated social workers and their care planning is managed by the duty team. In spite of the increasing numbers leaving care, the duty team has tried to minimise any negative impact on their outcomes by carefully prioritising those who need most support. However, a few older teenagers expressed concerns about how regularly they were able to see social workers. Transition and pathway planning to prepare unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people for adult working life are underdeveloped. Pathway plans pay good attention to identifying needs in health, social care and accommodation. However, few summarise progress made to remedy identified needs or fully address educational needs.

55. Arrangements to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people achieve economic well-being are satisfactory, although some aspects are underdeveloped. The council is resourceful in finding decent accommodation for care leavers. At 75%, there is good progression from schools to further education. Within its current remit, the EDULAC Team does not have the capacity to monitor thoroughly the quality of post-16 provision. The attainment of Level 2 qualifications at the age of 19 by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is not documented. Most young people speak positively about college provision, particularly for those with English as an additional language; however, some express concerns about teaching that does not meet their individual needs. Access to the wider curriculum is good in most colleges, where programmes combine English with vocational tasters. The need for further training in money management to prepare for independent living is not sufficiently addressed. The local authority and its partners recognise the need to ensure that all unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are allocated personal advisers. There are plans to further improve the quality of guidance for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the access to work experience and support for them to progress to higher education or employment. The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers in education, employment or training is satisfactory and numbers attending university are set to increase to good levels in September 2008.

## Service management



## Capacity to improve



56. **The management of services for children and young people is good. Capacity to improve further is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Clear focus on 'narrowing the gap' for children and young people.</p> <p>Strong leadership within each partner organisation.</p>	<p>Insufficient use of established working relationships with the community and voluntary sector to develop a commissioning strategy.</p>



<p>School results above national averages at all key stages.</p> <p>Good multi-agency work to support vulnerable groups, with good outcomes.</p> <p>Good multi-agency work to reduce anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Children and young people benefit well from regeneration initiatives.</p> <p>The good impact in education and in parts of children's social care of workforce development.</p>	<p>Performance information is not sufficiently used to set targets and drive improvements.</p>
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57. The management of services for children and young people is good. The capacity to improve further is good. The 2007 APA judged capacity to improve, including the management of services, as good. Established relationships between the council and its partners are effective. The aims of, and targets in, the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) are shared by partners and reflect both the analysed local need and users' priorities. Health and educational outcomes for children and young people in Solihull are above national averages and are improving, although there is a variance across the borough. The council and its partners have a clear vision to ensure that outcomes are consistent for children and young people, regardless of where in Solihull they live or their personal characteristics. Solihull describes this aim as 'narrowing the gap'. Significant infrastructure investment in North Solihull, planned over a 15 year period, and investment in service provision, for example in staff development, demonstrate the commitment of the council and its partners to achieving this aim and of its partners to delivering the vision.

58. Ambitions for children and young people are good. The local strategic partnership, the Solihull Partnership, sets a clear focus on children and young people and this, coupled with the evolution of the children's partnership into a Children and Young People's Trust, has improved the partnership's focus at both strategic and operational levels. The CYPP, refreshed in 2007, demonstrates a good analysis of need at a strategic level. The process has led to six clear priorities, including two, focusing on bullying and 'things to do; places to go', which were identified by actively engaged children and young people.

59. Partners have a shared understanding of local need at a strategic level. At a more detailed level, partners' knowledge of their communities is developing and, as a result, the diverse needs of communities and individuals are not yet systematically met. For example, there is too little out-of-school provision in the rural areas of Solihull, but only recently has investment in a mobile youth facility been agreed. The council and its partners are currently developing a

data warehouse, the Solihull Observatory, which will provide a sound knowledge base to further develop ambitions.

60. The aim to 'narrow the gap', to date, has focused on regeneration in North Solihull. This major project encompasses improved health and community facilities, new and refurbished housing, rebuilding and improving schools, reducing surplus places and enhancing extended schools opportunities. The project has also included job creation opportunities. Solihull College, which has a campus in the north of the borough, has contributed to the skills agenda and to reducing the number of 16 to 19 year olds not in education, employment or training. The council still has some way to go to reduce inequalities for all groups. For example, access arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at some youth and leisure facilities are not sufficiently integrated.

61. The partnership's approach to setting priorities is good. Priorities are shared and understood by partner agencies and, in relation to North Solihull, have been sustained. There is a good focus on local need alongside national requirements. For example, the overall priority to raise pupils' attainment is underpinned by specific targets for pupils in North Solihull, where attainment has been significantly lower than the Solihull average in the past. A large number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people arrive in Solihull due to a United Kingdom Border Agency reception facility located in the borough. Partners meet the challenge presented by these vulnerable young people and prioritise their needs within the CYPP.

62. Parents and carers are consulted on specific issues but not more generally on the council's priorities. Community and voluntary sector organisations, despite having often detailed knowledge and information, are not yet routinely involved in priority setting. The council is supporting its priorities by directing new money, for example investment funding from efficiency savings or new grants, into priorities. It has no track record of redirecting investment from low or non-priority areas to priorities, although in part this is due to its low funding base and therefore its focus on statutory functions.

63. The capacity of the partnership is good and the capacity to improve further is good. The partnership is characterised by strong leadership within each agency. The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services uses his knowledge of children and young people's issues to influence the Solihull Partnership from his position as Chair, thus ensuring children and young people's issues remain a key policy area. Service performance overall is strong, and improving, and the council and its partners have invested, and continue to invest, in children and young people. For example, in North Solihull 10 primary schools are replacing 15 schools through replacement or refurbishment to meet current and future needs. This investment in the built environment is being supported by investment in teaching staff, resulting in significantly reduced staff turnover, improved pupil achievement, fewer schools in an Ofsted category of concern and staff training programmes for middle and senior

managers that are improving sustainability. The council has enhanced its capacity through partnership with Solihull Care Trust and is developing its relationship with the voluntary sector to further increase capacity.

64. Partners work well at an operational level, with good inter-agency working a particular feature of children's centres and the support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Transforming children's services has been a key action of the partnership, with focused professional development for significant numbers of staff leading to positive outcomes, such as better recruitment and retention of social workers. Training has been multi-agency, including for school staff, in a number of areas, for example in the use of the CAF. Professional development processes, led by the council, have recently been enhanced by the appointment of a development manager within children's services to build on the successes achieved and further enhance the capacity of the partnership.

65. The council offers value for money. Outcomes for children are good, despite Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council being funded less well than the average for other metropolitan councils. The council is also committed to further improvements in value for money and its approach to achieving efficiency savings for 2008 and beyond by focusing investment on priority areas is designed to achieve this.

66. The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services, opposition spokespersons and children's services scrutiny members all play an appropriate role, but members beyond this group are not engaged with the children's agenda. The Lead Member for Children, who is also the Leader of the Council, does not have named members supporting him in the children's agenda, despite his significant council and partnership-wide responsibilities. Corporate parenting is underdeveloped.

67. The capacity of the Children and Young People's Trust to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups is greatly enhanced by partnership working and there is a track record of joint commissioning between the council and health and commissioning from the community and voluntary sector. The Trust understands the value of a robust commissioning strategy but has not yet developed a strategic approach to commissioning. There is currently a focus on existing service provision. For example, in the draft commissioning strategy the section on 'things to do; places to go' only explores the issues of commissioning within the council's youth service. The sports and leisure services, the council's charging policy and the role of the community and voluntary sectors are not included within the scope of what is to be reviewed. The lack of a developed commissioning strategy therefore limits the Trust's ability to be fully responsive to need.

68. Performance management of children's services is adequate. Processes for performance management are in place for the Children and Young People's Trust and within the council at corporate, departmental and service levels. The council uses a 'balanced scorecard' approach to performance management, and

whilst some key indicators are not identified within the scorecard, the process enables specific concerns at service level to be raised at departmental and even corporate levels should the concern continue. The council's scrutiny process has had some impact on improving outcomes for children and young people and contributes well to policy development. For example, school exclusion data are not considered within the corporate scorecard, but nevertheless the issue of exclusions has been considered by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board.

69. Performance management has led to some very effective targeted improvement work, for example in raising attainment at Key Stage 4 in the schools where attainment was significantly below Solihull averages. However, targets are not always SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). Too many targets, for example the targets around teenage pregnancy, are Solihull-wide rather than focused on the areas of underperformance or poorer outcome. Targets are often proxy, for example the targets for improving access to services are the number and percentage of first-preference secondary school places allocated and the number of enquiries to the children's information service. These are limited measures for access. The council's limited use of SMART target setting makes it difficult for it and its partners to be certain it is achieving its priorities.

70. Risk management and financial management are often considered alongside performance management, but there is scope for integrating the processes to provide the partnership with a better understanding of the outcomes from its investments. In some cases, potential outcomes are not measured and the partnership cannot be certain of impact. For example, North Solihull Fusion, a sports-based project designed to reduce anti-social behaviour, also has health implications, but the health impact is not measured. The council and its partners are therefore not in a position to understand fully the outcomes for children and young people from the activities they support.

71. Performance management processes include longitudinal and benchmarking information, but these are not used consistently to drive improvement. For example, the council often knows where it is out of line with statistical neighbours, other metropolitan councils or national averages, but not why it is out of line. There is too little use of benchmarking, in particular, to drive improvement.

72. The council is inconsistent in monitoring the quality and quantity of services it provides. Performance management of community and voluntary sector providers is particularly underdeveloped, with some subject to very little monitoring despite being significant providers to some groups of young people. The council and its partners cannot therefore be confident of the quality or reach of this provision.

## Annex A

### **MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOLIHULL.**

#### **Summary**

The overall effectiveness of the council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. Outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving and achieving economic well-being are good, whilst outcomes for positive contribution are outstanding. A good level of service has led to improvements for most children and young people. For example, the number of teenage conceptions has decreased; educational attainment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 has continued to rise; and the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment has increased. However, the council is aware of the inequalities that still exist between the north and south of the borough and for some groups of children and young people. It has set challenging improvement targets and is taking appropriate action. The council has a good capacity to improve.

The full annual performance assessment can be found at:

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=3075&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa\\_2007\\_334.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=3075&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa_2007_334.pdf)

## Annex B: Summary of the enhanced youth inspection report

### Main findings

1. The quality of youth work is good. The authority sufficiently secures its provision. Young people enjoy taking part and their engagement is sustained over time. As a result they make good progress, which is well recorded. Young people's voice and influence is given a high priority and many opportunities for participation are offered. The service is well led by an ambitious and determined management team, which is improving operational performance. A well understood curriculum is in place along with a comprehensive range of policies and procedures. Quality assurance arrangements are clear. Extensive use is made of borough-wide and neighbourhood needs assessments and priority groups are clearly identified by managers. However, the extent to which youth workers engage with young people from these groups is too variable and is not adequately monitored. Resources are of an acceptable quality overall and some are very good. The authority is in the process of ensuring all buildings provide the required level of accessibility under the Special Education Needs and Disability Discrimination Act (SENDA) 2001. An equality impact assessment lacks sufficient detail. Youth work is delivered in a range of different formats with a significant focus on project based work. This work is well planned and of consistently good quality but there is the capacity to engage more young people. Detached work lacks a coherent approach. Overall, the workforce is well supported and has access to adequate professional development opportunities and the service is taking action to reduce the numbers of youth support workers who are unqualified. Relationships with voluntary sector partners are good.

### Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

## Strengths

- Well-planned and responsive programmes sustain young people's involvement over time.
- High standards are achieved by most young people and youth work practice is good.
- Extensive use of accreditation adds value to young people's achievement.
- Access to a wide range of opportunities for engaging in decision making within the youth service enables young people to participate at an appropriate level.
- Leadership and operational management are good.
- Quality assurance arrangements enable the service to make accurate judgements about the quality of youth work practice and young people's achievement.

## Areas for development

- Increase the numbers of young people participating in youth work activities and ensure that all premises are fully accessible to those with mobility difficulties and/or visual impairment.
- Develop and implement detailed strategies for engaging with priority groups.
- Develop a more coherent approach to detached and outreach work.
- Increase the numbers of youth support workers who are appropriately qualified.

## Annex C

### CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Outcomes for children and young people in Solihull are good. They are healthy and the majority do better than the national average at each stage of school education. High proportions go on to further education, training or employment. Those in need of protection or social care benefit from prompt and effective services. Outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are mainly good. The proportion of children and young people in care is greater than that in comparable authorities due to the specific circumstances of a United Kingdom Border Agency screening centre being located in the borough; up to half of Solihull's looked after children arrive as unaccompanied minors, seeking asylum, and come straight into Solihull's care. There are good outcomes for local children and unaccompanied asylum seekers in care. The great majority of children and young people behave responsibly and some make a significant contribution to their schools and communities.

2. The management of children's services in Solihull is good. Strong leadership from senior managers in the Council and councillors ensures that ambitions for 'narrowing the gap' between higher and lower achieving groups of children and young people are widely understood and have a high profile within the Solihull Partnership's policies. Good prioritisation has been achieved through consideration of local need alongside national requirements, but the knowledge of local partner organisations is not always sufficiently used in the process. Management and workforce capacity is good. Recruitment and development policies have improved retention, notably for teachers. Partners and community sector organisations make an impressive contribution to preventative and family support work and to meeting the increasingly diverse needs in the area. Financial management is effective. Performance management systems are adequate. Staff supervision is generally effective and purposeful. Significant improvements have been brought about in schools, but some other service areas lack benchmarks and detailed quality measures.

3. The Children and Young People's Trust is building confidently on established, effective partnerships to achieve localised integrated commissioning, albeit at a measured pace to suit the local context. Children and young people's views are a key influence in formulating overarching priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Plans are in place to tackle the gaps in performance management through the Solihull data Observatory. With strong leadership and good workforce capacity, the Council has good capacity to continue to improve.

4. The health of most children and young people is good, although there is variation in some indicators, such as the incidence of obesity and tooth decay for some age groups, across the area. Developments in partnership



arrangements in 2006/07 have already brought about some improvements, such as the reduction in teenage pregnancies and the increased proportion of young people identified and receiving substance misuse treatment. Schools and the 11 children's centres play a significant role in promoting mental well-being, healthy eating and supporting parents to improve family health. The health of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is supported very well through specialist and universal services.

5. Safeguarding standards are good. Solihull Safeguarding Children's Board has established purposeful multi-agency working through its business plans. Children's views have been influential in speeding up action on bullying. Road safety is very good and street crime levels are very low. Schools, and early years, play and youth settings all practise good risk assessments and thorough staff vetting. Child protection plans are managed well for the comparatively low numbers of children and young people most in need of protection. Children in care are skilfully supported by qualified social workers. There is more to do to engage representatives of a wider group of councillor's and council services in corporate parenting.

6. Education and personal development outcomes are good and the great majority of pupils enjoy their school life. Achievement from pre-school through primary and secondary schools, and for those taking part in youth activities, is good. With good support from a specialist education team, looked after children achieve well, and in 2006/07 20 per cent of this group gained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, effectively double the national average. Reorganised school improvement arrangements have secured a good reduction in the number of schools causing concern between 2006 and 2008. School attendance is good, including that for children in care. Processes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well managed and the range of provision is effective in securing good progress. Voluntary sector organisations have given a great lead in securing more accessible play and leisure opportunities for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, there is unused capacity in the good range of youth activities on offer.

7. The 2007 Annual Performance Assessment judged making a positive contribution to be outstanding at a time of intensive consultation with children and young people regarding the CYPP. One year on, the excellent impact is evident in the refreshed priorities. Support to promote emotional wellbeing of the most vulnerable through projects such as SEAL is well embedded with good outcomes. Positive attitudes are widely evident among young people and the rate of offending among young people is low. There have been good reductions in levels of reported antisocial behaviour in North Solihull where the NS Fusion partnership has targeted efforts to reduce anti-social behaviour and offending. Individuals taking part in community life, including young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attending mainstream youth services, make very good progress in personal and social development. However, not all groups, such as those with visual impairments, are well supported with the provision of

accessible material to help them make positive contribution beyond decisions about their own immediate service needs.

8. Support to promote economic well-being is good. High quality childcare is widely available. The collegiate approach to the 14 to 19 strategy is bringing about slow but marked improvement in the diploma offer and has improved the retention of young people in education. More young people gain Level 2 and 3 qualifications by age 19 than the national average. Many of the regeneration benefits in North Solihull are targeted at 'narrowing the gap' through improved education, housing and leisure facilities. Effective work between Solihull Community Housing and Connexions ensures that 100 per cent of care leavers, including asylum-seeking young people, have excellent access to suitable housing. The proportions of care leavers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, training and employment are very good.

## Annex D

### **SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

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 inspectors from Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission 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 these findings plus aspects of the most recent Annual Performance Assessment 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 Solihull and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services, 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. This review explores these issues by focusing on children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children who are looked after, children at risk or requiring safeguarding and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as an additional investigation. It evaluates the collective contribution made by all relevant children's services to outcomes for these children and young people.
4. The review took place in two stages, consisting of an analysis stage (where recorded evidence was scrutinised) and a two-week fieldwork stage (where inspectors met children and young people and those who deliver services for them).